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On the cover:
Derek Jarman's 'Caravaggio',
which is reviewed on page 136.
Photo: Mike Laye.

- ◀ **In the Picture** Oshima in Paris/Hawaii/Irish production/FESTRIO/TV writers/Clermont-Ferrand/Rotterdam/Dimitri Tiomkin. 74

- Who Goes to the Cinema?** David Docherty, David Morrison and Michael Tracey of the Broadcasting Research Unit analyse the current state of cinema-going in Britain. 81

- Nanou & Hôtel du Paradis** 86

- 1986: The Year of Independent Television in France** 88
Belinda Meares describes the franchise struggle for 'La Cinq', France's new commercial TV channel, which began transmitting in February.

- Isherwood** 92
James Ivory reflects on a European exile and an unmade documentary.

- Double Takes** Kockenlocker on BFY and audience percentages, L'Ecole de Shoreham, an intemperate blast and a letter from Lulu. 95

- Nails That Stick Out** 98
Tony Rayns profiles seven Japanese film-makers (born between 1956 and 62): non-conformist 'nails' who won't be hammered in.

- ◀ **The Italian Comedy** 105
In the first major article in English to celebrate the forgotten Golden Age of Italian silent comedy, David Robinson salutes the Pordenone Festival and introduces Polidor, Cretinetti and friends.

- Better Than a Blackboard** 113
After two seasons as director of the London Film Festival, Derek Malcolm assesses the job and answers some of his critics.

- Denham Studios: The Golden Jubilee of Korda's Folly** 116
Sarah Street on what happened to the Prudential Assurance Company's money . . .

- ◀ **A Walk on the Wild Side** 'Vigour, risk, excess, ruthlessness, obsession': 124
William Johnson summons up some overlooked British pictures.

- The Name of the Rose** 129
Umberto Eco talks exclusively to Gideon Bachmann about Jean-Jacques Annaud's adaptation of his medieval murder mystery.

- ◀ **Film Reviews** Revolution/Ran/A Room with a View/The Color Purple/Caravaggio/Ginger & Fred. 132

- Book Reviews** Orson Welles: A Biography & The Making of Citizen Kane/The Cinema Book/Film: The Front Line 1983 & 1984. 139

- Letters** 142

- On Now** 144

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Oshima with his simian star. Photo: Arnaud Borrel.

Monkey business

Oshima in Paris with a chimp and an acrobat

Anyone visiting the Billancourt Studios in Paris recently would have been surprised to see a chimpanzee, standing upright and looking into a small mirror, while two assistants carefully combed its hair. When it removed its head, the heavily made-up features of an English acrobat and dancer, Ailsa Berk, emerged, now the animal lead in Oshima's new film *Max, Mon Amour*. Oshima's first European production came about through a series of meetings in Japan with Serge Silberman (then producing Kurosawa's *Ran*); he suggested a script in collaboration with Jean-Claude Carrière who, of course, worked with Bunuel and Silberman on the former's last films in France. The three hit it off and came up with the bizarre story of a bourgeois English husband working in Paris who discovers that his wife is having some kind of liaison with a chimp (significantly, the true nature of the relationship is never explained). The creature is brought home, set up in a special cage, and attempts—such as its casual presentation to dinner guests—are made to integrate it into family and official life.

Oshima, who has now acquired a flow of breathy, uninhibited English necessary for a film made in both English and French, seems to see *Max, Mon Amour* as some kind of ironic morality play. He chuckles over the more

outrageous aspects of the script and is full of praise for the diligence with which Miss Berk assumed her simian duties. 'Everyone is very considerate to her, because we all know what a hard task she has.' Certainly, her movements, manner and little grunts were amazingly lifelike, helped in some scenes by a small army of manipulators and wire-pullers for the facial expressions.

When a group of English journalists visited the set, the main shooting had been completed and we saw only a few pick-up shots and a fascinating example of front projection (aided by a team from Samuelson's). Seated on a small box in front of the screen, Max simulated riding on top of a car down the Champs-Elysées and there, down on the video screen, was the combined image of buildings flashing past as Max wiggled and thumped and pretended to go round corners. Apart from the later working hours, Oshima professed to find few differences in a European studio ambience and clearly enjoyed working with cameraman Raoul Coutard and designer Pierre Guffroy, whose elegant set of dining-room, corridors and bedrooms was in the process of demolition during our visit.

Thanks to Mr Silberman, we were able to see about 45 minutes of cut sequences (almost half the film) and, when the lights went up, one had the eerie feeling of having seen the film Buñuel never made. Not only was Carrière's cool, precise conversational tone instantly recognisable but Oshima has elected to shoot in an equally cool, classical style, with a fairly static camera and absolutely no visual frills

to clutter up the narrative. It looks like a French film, in fact, especially in the central dinner party scene where a marvellous collection of staid, earnest guests watch with some astonishment as Max bangs his way to the table and then fixes the wife with an alarmingly amorous gaze. Oshima's concise way with an action scene was also evident in the explosive sequence in which Max gets hold of the husband's rifle; a great chase round the room ends with a sudden invasion of armed police, looking as if they had come across a nest of terrorists.

The quirky Anglo-French casting includes Anthony Higgins, Diana Quick and the French comedian/director Pierre Etaix as a brusque detective ('I've found your rival, sir—it's a monkey,' he tells the husband confidently), but, judging from the rushes, the acting revelation will be Charlotte Rampling as the wife. Although he likes to shoot quickly with little rehearsal of actors, Oshima seems to have precisely shaped Rampling's other-worldly qualities to fit the film's mood—the low-pitched voice, the grave and pallid face, the glance that seems to hide more than it reveals.

A beautifully lit shot of the wife and Max sharing a brief siesta adds to the mystery, suggesting that what at first glance seemed to have the makings of a dirty story may emerge as a surprisingly chaste one. But one thing already seems certain—Silberman's bringing together of such disparate international talents will result in one of 1986's most discussed films.

JOHN GILLETT

Hawaii

A Vietnamese deception and a veteran 'benshi'

Surprisingly few of the world's 300-odd film festivals (*Variety's* count) deserve anything more than local attention, but the five-year-old Hawaii Film Festival already demands to be taken as seriously as Pesaro, Edinburgh or Nantes. It starts with two major advantages. One is that it's funded and run by a department of the East-West Center (an autonomous off-shoot of the University of Hawaii), which frees it from both film-trade pressures and the demands of the box-office. All its screenings are, in fact, free, which means that the most *recherché* films can draw good houses. The other advantage is that it takes place in the middle of the Pacific, in a community that accommodates Polynesians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans and Americans all on more or less equal terms.

The festival is devoted to Asian, Pacific and US independent movies, and its centrepiece is a four-day symposium that draws participants from all those territories. December's event brought together a wonderfully heterogeneous group of scholars, critics and film-makers, who came up with an extraordinary mixture of eccentric, esoteric and illuminating papers. The symposium yielded no very startling conclusions (the oppression of women is universal, politicised film-makers face censorship virtually everywhere, Asia's film industries are being hit hard by video), but it certainly opened many eyes to the character of several under-documented national cinemas. I, for one, came away knowing more than I ever dreamed possible about the changing image of motherhood on Japanese TV, not to mention the weight of Islamic sexism in Malaysian popular comedy.

There were discoveries to be made in the festival proper. The slow and apparently painful emergence of Vietnamese cinema, so far largely confined to France and Italy, took a significant step forward with the screening of Dang Nhat Minh's *When the Tenth Month Comes* (*Bao gio cho den thang muoi*, 1984). Its protagonist is a young war widow who decides to spare the feelings of her son and father-in-law by concealing news of her husband's death from them. She carries through the deception by enlisting the local teacher to forge letters from the dead man, but eventually feels herself cracking under the strain of maintaining the facade, a strain aggravated by her growing

emotional intimacy with the teacher.

On Vietnam's equivalent of All Souls' Day, she seeks out the spirit of her husband. The sad, silent encounter somehow gives her the strength to carry on—and perhaps also to break with Confucian tradition by marrying the teacher. Dang's film is less remarkable for its delicate understatement (it shares its emotional reticence with other recent films from Hanoi, whereas the films now made in what used to be the Saigon studios are apparently very different in character) than for the subtlety with which it questions traditional values: the spur to the woman's self-realisation, for example, is the scene in which she has to play the role of a filial daughter in a village opera.

Peter Wang, known as an actor in Wayne Wang's *Chan Is Missing* and Allen Fong's *Ah Ying*, has added to the fast-growing body of Asian-American cinema by directing, co-writing and starring in *The Great Wall Is a Great Wall* (the title is a Nixon *bon mot* from the days of ping-pong diplomacy), in which he plays the quirky patriarch of a Chinese-American family who descend on their Beijing relatives in search of 'roots'. The film bends over backwards to be likeable, and even-handedly satirises both American parochialism and Chinese intransigence, but finally fails to do justice to its own potential. The *Rocky*-style ending at a table-tennis tournament is a particular mistake. But the generally unhurried pace admits some finely observed comic touches.

A strong documentary section was spearheaded by Carma Hinton's *Small Happiness: Women of a Chinese Village*, one of the most intimate and revelatory documentaries ever shot in China, and Curtis Choy's *Fall of the I Hotel*, a film about the enforced dispersal of the Filipino community in San Francisco that avoids agit-prop and sociology clichés alike. But the biggest thrill came from Hawaii's contribution to the international refurbishment of silent classics: the festival screened a 1928 Japanese movie, Inagaki Hiroshi's *Horo Zanmai*, with a live *benshi* commentary by a young Japanese-American. The old samurai movie had its pleasures, but the occasion became really memorable only when the 90-year-old Nakahama Kamesuke got up to demonstrate the way that *benshi* used to perform. He was in a good position to know: he started working as a *benshi* on the island of Maui in 1923. An event unique to Hawaii, and also the best possible foundation stone for festivals to come.

TONY RAYNS

Irish acorns

Two features on location around Dublin

They have been talking about a renaissance of the Irish film industry ever since a cheerful chap called Sheamus Smith would descend annually on the Cannes Film Festival with a suitcase full of Jameson's to help tout the delights of the National Film Studios of Ireland at Ardmore. But, apart from periodic forays by John Boorman and a handful of other film-makers, this Irish renaissance has never really happened. At the time of writing, even Ardmore is closed, having, over the years, been bounced between various financiers as a potential centre for much-vaunted production plans.

So the sight of two features shooting virtually back-to-back this past late summer and autumn in and around Dublin could be regarded as tantamount to an Irish production explosion. First off was *Eat the Peach*, a 'modern Western' directed by Peter Ormrod (*Rachel and the Beelzebub Bombardiers*). It's the story of a young man who, inspired by the Elvis Presley movie *Roustabout*, decides to build a motorcycle wall of death near his home just south of the border. To finance his ambition, he and a mate smuggle pigs, drink and videos across the border. The money for the film (£1.3m) was also appropriately cross-border. Channel 4 put up £500,000 and the Irish Film Board £100,000; the rest was raised by the producers, Strongbow Films, via the Irish equivalent of the Business Expansion Scheme.

The Fantasist, drawn from the thriller *Goosefoot* by the expatriate Irishman Patrick McGinley, is the first venture of New Irish Film Productions. Mike Murphy, a director of the company and executive producer of the £1.5m movie, was confident about the future: 'We have the talent and expertise to compete internationally, and we are convinced that a major Irish film industry will emerge within the next few years.' The reality is, perhaps, not quite so rosy. The setting for the film is Irish enough, as are the supporting cast and crew. But the producer, director, cinematographer and stars (Timothy Bottoms, Moira Harris and Christopher Cazenove) are, variously, English and American.

Producer Mark Forstater is anxious not to play down the Irish contribution to the budget. The fact remains, however, that most of the money came from Britain's ITC Entertainment and that arranging the minority Irish cash was a nightmare of red tape. Not that Forstater, an American based in London, is a stranger to seeking cash in less obvious places. In the past decade, he has made films in South Africa (*Marigolds in August*), Zambia (*The Grass Is Singing*), the United States (*Not for Publication*) and Berlin (*The Cold Room, Forbidden*), not to mention Britain (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*).

'When the Government took away capital allowances,' Forstater said, 'there was, financially, almost no reason to make a film in Britain. Remember, we'd lost Eady too. So, to find the last, crucial bit of money, you had to go looking. Now you might find it where there are tax

advantages—Ireland, Norway, Germany or Australia.' As well as supervising his film, the peripatetic producer has also been assiduously cultivating the Republic's moneymen. But what of the 'renaissance'? Forstater is doubtful. 'There's a limit to the films that can be made in Ireland because the number of crews is limited. Certainly, though, there could be an increase in production facilities. One advantage to making films here is that the crews know each other. There are no settling in problems and there don't seem to be any moaning minnies.'

One man definitely not moaning is director Robin Hardy, who has returned to feature films after an absence of thirteen years. Hardy had a glittering career in commercials in the 60s and early 70s before directing *The Wicker Man*, the acclaimed cult horror picture which he co-scripted with Anthony Shaffer. *The Wicker Man* became something of a *cause célèbre* because it simply refused to be buried during one of the periodic reshuffles at British Lion. The press demanded that it be shown and a heavily cut version was put out on a double bill with *Don't Look Now*.

Hardy, who subsequently moved to the United States, spent five years and a small fortune on lawyers extricating *The Wicker Man* from an American tax shelter. The negative had been destroyed, but, with the help of an editor who had kept a print of the original, he was able to restore his own cut. The American reaction to the film, which now ran some 18 minutes longer than the 1973 version, made his labours worthwhile.

The Fantasist: Jim Bartley, Moira Harris, Timothy Bottoms, Mick Lally.



Two years ago, after establishing another successful career, this time as a novelist (*The Education of Don Juan* and a sequel), Hardy decided on a cautious return to features. He optioned *Goosefoot* with Andy Summers, a member of the Police rock group who was looking for a break in acting. After Summers dropped out, Forstater came on the scene and wove together the finance. *The Fantastist* is about a mass murderer on the loose in Dublin. He has the perverse not to say esoteric habit of leaving his victims in the fleshy pose adopted by Louise O'Malley, mistress of Louis XV, in Boucher's portrait now hanging in a Munich gallery. Hardy describes the film as a 'story of laughter and death'. Very Irish.

QUENTIN FALK

FESTRIO

A Marquez Western and a Welles reconstruction

There was a carnival air about the second International Festival of Film, TV and Video (FESTRIO) held in Rio de Janeiro at the end of last year, even if, at times, the prevailing mood was distinctly chaotic. Press releases and printable stills seemed as rare as the toucan which is FESTRIO's mascot, and the official programme appeared only days before the festival ended. Many of the Toucans and other jury prizes came to roost in the Latin American camp, less because of politics or politesse towards the host country than, as jury president Luis Carlos Barreto stressed, because North America and Europe withheld their best work from competition, a reluctance that will have to be overcome if FESTRIO is to retain its status as a *la*-category festival.

This said, there were some notable pickings. The Colombian entry, *Tiempo de Morir* (*Time to Die*), which netted Toucans for Best Film and Best Actor as well as two jury prizes, was an elegant feature debut from Prague-trained TV and theatre director Jorge Ali Triana. This classically simple Western boasted some startlingly beautiful, distinctively Colombian locations, one of which, a hillside village called Armero, was destroyed by a volcanic eruption a week before the festival, lending the film's title a tragic poignancy.

Brazil's Nobel Prize-winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote the script (his first) for *Time to Die* and prefaced it with the legend 'The only thing worse than the fear of death is the fear of killing.' The film traces a vicious circle of vendettas and futile machismo with the clean lines and sombre remorseless-



Gabriel García Márquez.

ness of Greek tragedy. But the tone is lightened by some marvellously quirky touches. In one scene, a convicted killer quietly lends his mistress a hand with her knitting, an image which, according to Marquez, was the starting point for his story. And, before delivering his deadly shot at the final face-off in a deserted bullring, the grizzled gunman pulls a pair of spectacles from his breast pocket and deliberately, rather regrettably, adjusts them on his nose.

Triana, who is collaborating with Marquez on his next project, an adaptation of *No One Writes to the Colonel*, insisted that his film should not be seen as a Western in the Hollywood mould, but as an example of the symbiotic relationship between Latin American cinema and the indigenous literary tradition of magical realism. Several other films in competition were similarly inspired to break with dominant American cinematic forms.

Based on a novel by Machado de Assis, *Bras Cubas*, a satirical portrait of Brazil's *haute bourgeoisie*, excited attention for its manic, decentred narrative style, though director Julio Bressane tended occasionally to depict a hollow lifestyle with meretricious glibness.

Shown out of competition, *Nem Tudo e Verdade* (*Not Everything Is True*) was an equally unorthodox tribute to Orson Welles' wayward genius. The boy wonder arrives in Rio in 1942 with a fistful of dollars and plans for a documentary called *It's All True*, commissioned as part of President Roosevelt's 'good neighbour' policy. But instead of shooting sunny postcard images, Welles starts poking around the *favelas*, the shanty towns. Six months later, the project was aborted after Welles had spent \$600,000, thoroughly offended both US and Brazilian governments and lost one of his principal actors in a drowning accident. *Nem Tudo e Verdade* marries

entertaining archive footage of Welles cutting a swath through the Cidade Maravilhosa to some dreamlike dramatised reconstructions, though these suffered from Arrigo Barnabé's somewhat unconvincing impersonation.

The only other documentary, also from Brazil, was *Ceu Aberto* (*Open Sky*), which drew an emotional response from the local audience. This account of the restoration of democracy in Brazil, centred on the election and sudden death, after a brief illness, of President Tancredo Neves, tends at times towards hagiography. It remains, however, a powerful portrait of a nation emerging euphorically and a little incredulously from a long winter of military dictatorship.

Predictably (and often in predictable manner), several films dealt with the struggle against colonialism, but the most impressive, *Um Adeus Português* (*A Portuguese Goodbye*), looked at this experience from a European perspective. Two stories crosscut between a small band of poor bloody infantry in Portuguese Africa in 1973 and a Lisbon family twelve years later haunted by the memory of a son lost in the war. Joao Botelho has been described as a Portuguese Ozu and one can see why: his film is full of visual echoes and the Lisbon narrative could almost be a remake of *Tokyo Story*. Melancholy, contemplative and stunningly photographed, in shimmering monochrome for the flashbacks, rich colour for the contemporary scenes, *Um Adeus Português* won Botelho a Silver Toucan for Best Director, even though in the end it seemed tantalisingly opaque and impenetrable.

The Argentine comedy *Esperando la Carroza* (*Waiting for the Chariot*) wrung some unlikely laughs from the scenario of a senile matriarch (played by a

Esperando la Carroza.



popular comedian in drag) who drives her hapless children to distraction. Spanish and Portuguese speakers were hugely amused, though one suspects that the zany humour lost as much in translation as Harold Pinter's screenplay for *Turtle Diary*, which left the locals visibly puzzled.

SHEILA JOHNSTON

TV writers

The Voice of Hope and the Four-Minute Film

What hope could Ted Childs (Central), Lloyd Shirley (Thames) and Peter Goodchild and Jonathan Powell (BBC) offer writers, established and aspiring, of seeing their work on television? The question was posed to the panel by TV critic Peter Fiddick at a London Screenwriters Workshop seminar which he chaired at the ICA last November. 'Sadly, not a lot,' Childs replied. There was pressure to go with the tried and tested. Jonathan Powell was more optimistic. He detected no decline in the standards of popular TV drama: among recent programmes he had particularly admired were *Knockback*, *Connie* and *Edge of Darkness*. Fiddick himself praised *Brookside* and *EastEnders*: 'That's where I would point writers to learn their craft.'

Peter Goodchild denied that the BBC was producing less drama. Comparing the mid-70s with 1984, the statistics were 105 plays produced, against 57. In the 70s, however, the BBC was making many half-hour plays, a species now virtually extinct. Adding up the screen times gives a different picture: 90 hours then and 82 hours in 1984, with film increased from 20 to 50 per cent. Goodchild's own budget had gone

up in real terms by 25 per cent. The total BBC, ITV and Channel 4 drama output was around 700 hours a year.

'Sparkier directors like using film, if only to get away from their bosses,' Fiddick remarked, commenting on the large investment by television companies in studios. Would this lead to more drama being videotaped? Lloyd Shirley compared film and video with a painter's use of water-colour, oils and tempera: 'You use what is right for the job.' Ted Childs noted that young programme-makers, often from film schools, wanted to work on film. Co-producers (that peculiar breed) did not 'want to get into bed with you' if you were all-tape.

'We're in the business of telling stories and the bottom line is, we'll tell them any way we can,' Powell said, though he conceded that the BBC had not fully explored the uses of lightweight video equipment. Goodchild took this up: 'The BBC has a lot of hangars, but comparatively little in the way of post-production facilities. When this changes, as it will, change.' Where does all this leave the poor writer, though? The Voice of Hope stood up at the side of the hall. Caroline Oulton, a script editor at the BBC, told the audience that in 3½ years she had commissioned nine original works, six of which were by writers completely new to television. The Voice of Hope sat down to loud applause.

Lloyd Shirley pointed out that ITV existed to maximise peak-time ratings, this being the key factor in any production. Nick Elliott (LWT), from the audience, maintained that the BBC now had a financial advantage over ITV. Falling advertising revenue had made the commercial companies wary of high-cost programming. Drama programmes, inevitably, were the first to feel the squeeze. David Benedictus (Channel 4) asserted, however, that the only test of drama was: 'When something brilliant hits you, you go out and get it made.' His annual budget was £7m—'which sounds a lot, but isn't really if you want to make a lot of drama.' And the future? Benedictus pointed to Channel 4's 'Four-Minute Films'. The Channel was also involved in a consortium of European TV companies. Costs could be cut to one-sixth if all participants joined in a project. British writers, he said, were highly regarded on the Continent.

A member of the London Screenwriters Workshop asked what the television companies were doing to train upcoming writers. 'Giving £8,500 to you last year,' shot back the combative Shirley. The best learning instrument for writers, he added, was the home television set. Ted

Childs said, 'Every script sent to me is read.' Most new writers, however, came to him through the recommendation of agents. Julian Friedmann, an agent, stood up on cue: 'This is a business. New writers write scripts that do not work in the marketplace. We look at things in a very commercial way.' Another agent, from Curtis Brown, suggested that writers should make a name for themselves in other media, such as theatre or journalism, before attempting to move into television. The case seems to be that while drama executives are all for new talent, budgets and slots pressure them to use the 'tried and tested'. Not, perhaps, a very rosy outlook for those writers 'aspiring to be paid', as the LSW calls them.

JULIAN JACKSON

Clermont-Ferrand

A festival of short films

The short before the feature—a short feature or a genre of its own? Despite familiar debates about the popcorn and ice-cream oblivion of cinema shorts, the French still have a healthy commitment to producing and promoting a form of cinema which, thanks to last year's Films Bill, is now in its death throes in Britain. Over 400 shorts are made annually in France and a special lobby, L'Agence du Court Métrage, works solely to promote the distribution and exhibition of these films through festivals and by finding new markets, outlets and funding possibilities. There are at least six festivals in France alone devoted to the short in its own right, but the group running the one at Clermont-Ferrand for the last eight years has now established it as the most important, taking on the mantle of the defunct Lille event with an international festival supported by Jack Lang's Ministry of Culture.

So, in the first week of February with the fountains frozen in spidery stalactites, the black volcanic city of Clermont-Ferrand played host to over 120 short films, their makers and potential buyers from television stations and other festivals. Ten hours of screenings a day in the Alpha cinema, debates every morning, exhibitions, a reception in the Town Hall and a closing ceremony in the Maison des Congrès—the town seemed to support in style and numbers (over 12,000 tickets sold during the week) an event which here would be regarded as the lunatic fringe.

Within any grouping of films, themes begin to emerge almost by accident. Here the emphasis



Wings of Death, by Nicola Bruce and Mike Coulson.

was very much on classic narrative cinema: the short story with the neat twist at the end, technically accomplished and well acted (often by famous faces) in glossy 35mm with the backing of either Antenne 2 or the CNC (Centre National du Cinéma). A large proportion of the filmmakers presented their credentials for turning to features—the calling card seemed to be a genre of its own. A morbid fascination with corpses prevailed, at least two films had passing shots of women reading the same book and several explored the relationship between a son and an absent father.

In contrast to the glossy professionalism of the *Diva* style, the few student, regional and documentary films stood out with refreshing vigour, not at all disadvantaged by their lack of means. *La Santé, une Prison dans la Ville* (Isabelle Martin) was a sensitive portrayal of a community living in the shadow of a prison, and *Vision* (Fayimeh Maftabar), much in the mould of London art school films, a colourful autobiography. Films from or about North African immigrants also injected the French chic with an urgent realism that would seem to signal a new New Wave if the directors are allowed the chance to continue. A marginal, oppositional stance allied to a genuine feeling for cinema came through in the films: *La Poupee qui Tousse* (Farid Louassa), *Barberousse pas de Chance* (Bekka) and *Alger la Blanche* (Cyril Collard; awarded prizes by the public and Canal Plus) which explored the problems of cross-cultural friendship and homosexual relationships.

Poussière (Everything Else) (Agathe Merlet) was another film which stays in the memory for its sympathetic treatment of adolescent jealousy and rebellion, immaculately shot in 35mm black and white and with a superb young cast. Marie-Hélène Quinton's *L'Index* was a finely scripted period piece with contemporary relevance showing the dilemma of a young man facing military service and the lengths he will go to avoid it. Other films made their points more bluntly—illiteracy, prisoners of conscience dying under torture or Chris Marker's dire warnings for the year 2084. Some films were disarmingly modest, admitting their own failings and limitations—Raymond Depardon confessing the impossibility of filming *New York* and Patrice Onfray declaring that he hadn't said what he wanted to in *Film à Mon Père*. Others again overreached themselves in improbably complex plotting and allusion that needed the length of a feature to be developed.

The international selection (53 films from 29 countries) seemed invigorating and varied, although here again the selectors' predilection for fiction ruled the day. They were however justifiably proud of the feather in their cap, Bergman's photographic study of his mother, *Karins Ansikte*, and of Helke Sanders' beautifully controlled polemic about housing, *Nr 1—aus Berichten der Wach und Patrouillendienste*. Impossible to make comparisons between so many films made with such different budgets and biases, but the rougher films were as well appreciated as the smooth.

There seemed to be great interest in the British shorts, and L'Agence du Court Métrage awarded their prize to the BFI's *Wings of Death*, by Nicola Bruce and Mike Coulson, which will give it French distribution. It led me to wonder whether a British festival would yield such a rich crop and revive interest in the short film, which the French still prove to be that rare 'espace de liberté' in the cinema.

Claire Barwell

Rotterdam

Fifteen different words for 'bourgeois'

Fifteen home-produced films were on display to the jury at the Rotterdam Festival, and the commonest complaint at the summing up was the general lack of interest shown by the Dutch in their own contemporary social life. While a solid handful of films dealt with the perennial topic of the Dutch relation to the 'Jewish problem' while under Nazi occupation, one gained more knowledge of day to day life by walking between the Hilton Hotel and the Film House than one did from last year's production of film. Since the Dutch probably have fifteen different words for 'bourgeois', this may be because their current social life is somewhat lacking in drama. But there is a limit to the mileage in Anne Frank.

The prize went to *Pervola* by Orlov Seunke, a director known here for his *Taste of Water*. *Pervola* is an imaginary kingdom, far to the North, in the icy wastes of what looks like Finland on a Sunday. Two brothers, a rich

and powerful businessman and a gay, failed vaudeville performer, are summoned there to their father's deathbed. On their six day sleigh-trek, accompanying the coffin to its final resting place, the barriers come down between them, the businessman's treachery is revealed and the gay man achieves an unguessed at inner strength. A straightforward enough story, but distinguished by a strong fantasy element, and an unusual directorial eye for viewing things a little off beam. *Pervola* seems to be in the grip of an unexplained war between the shaven-headed Blacks and the invisible Whites. And the gay hero's moment of self-realising triumph occurs when his toupee catches fire, he rips it off, and confronts the world in all his bald glory.

At least one vote for best film went to *Red Desert Penitentiary* by George Sluizer, a sly, off-the-wall comedy about a Dutch film troupe in Texas desperately trying to make a 'b' Western, and finding themselves hampered not least by the Marilyn Monroe lookalike with whom they have saddled themselves. Apart from being plumper, she is even more witless than the original, and has more trouble removing her clothes to boot. While more ragged round the edges than *Pervola*, the film contained such exchanges as: Dumb Script Girl: 'There's no need to be rude.' Male Lead: 'There may be no need, but there is a *colossal urge*'.

The Dream by Pieter Verhoeven (in which Channel 4 had a hand) proved to be a costume piece about the early union movements among nineteenth century farm workers in Friesland, in the North of the low countries. Solid,

handsomely mounted, heart-in-the-right-place; all the usual adjectives of faint praise which point to something a wee bit dull. The jury did however watch it all the way through, which is more than can be said for Paul Verhoeven's ridiculous piece of Middle Ages cod-piece drama *Flesh and Blood*.

Elsewhere, this loosely organised but very friendly festival turned up some welcome rarities, gems and unseen masterpieces. A Stephen Frears retro revived the wonderful *Gumshoe*. A Yanigimachi retro gave us the opportunity to see what presaged the genius of *Himatsuri*. And a Makavejev retro screened the rare *Sweet Movie*, which was quite disgusting. Jonathan Rosenbaum has inaugurated a kind of travelling roadshow about Orson Welles, involving many of Welles' colleagues, friends and intimates and a fascinating video collage of lost fragments, film trailers, casual conversation, and one full 50s TV thriller which he narrated on-screen for Desilu productions. Also immensely popular was the screening of the recently restored print of Feuillade's *Les Vampires*. Musidora dancing in a black body stocking and bat wings, pens that drip unknown poisons, secret societies with vague intentions to rule the world, men in black masks flitting over the Paris rooftops; quite apart from the innocent wonder of it all, it became very apparent why the later surrealists claimed such great things for the serials.

A random find of real power was Fredi Murer's *Höhenfeuer*, a film which followed the daily life of a Swiss hill farmer and his family. The endless round of toil

is helped by their son, a fifteen-year-old deaf mute with the temperament of a child. He is doted on by his elder sister, however, and inevitably an incestuous love develops which leads them into a strange usurpation of the family and farm. The Alps are filmed in a style which sets your eyes on fire, without succumbing to the obvious temptations of chic scenery.

Perhaps the two greatest finds at the festival were the 'lost' Polish films, *No End* by Krzysztof Kieslowski, and *A Woman on Her Own* by Agnieszka Holland. Both had been forbidden foreign showings by the Polish authorities, and it is not hard to see why since both are scathing indictments of that country's social shortcomings. In *No End*, a widow is haunted by the return, on-screen, of her husband, who was once a defending lawyer for people charged under martial law. He is both witness and critic to the injustices of the present legal system. *A Woman on Her Own* is an even more naked descent into utter misery, about a 40-year-old postwoman, desperately trying to fend for herself and her small son in abject poverty. When she falls in love, the man is a cripple. Both films end with the premature deaths of their heroines.

There was much else of instruction and delight at the festival, not least the new Paradjanov, *The Fortress of Suram*, which proved as dazzling and as arcane as *The Colour of Pomegranates*; like a trip to a previously unheard-of country.

Chris Peachment

Tiomkin

A phenomenal dramatic instinct

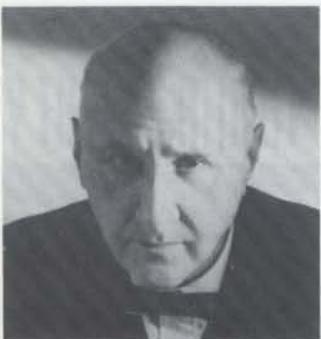
Russian by birth, American by choice, Russo-European-American by style and temperament, composer Dimitri Tiomkin dealt in vivid melodies, exotic instrumentation and virtuoso fervour and is known for music which now has the thrust of a jet-plane, now achieves pop status; quasi-Soviet realism one moment, the exotic orientalism of pre-Revolution Russian composers the next. From the start he showed a natural instinct for the theatre: he may not have been so intensely interested in the mechanics of music, but he had a phenomenal dramatic instinct, he knew what worked, what entertained, what moved, what exhilarated.

It is a pretty sensational cumulative experience to attend a retrospective consisting solely, concentratedly of his best work (as I have just done at the NFT). In certain respects the man was

The Fortress of Suram, by Sergei Paradjanov and Dodo Abachidze.



IN THE PICTURE



Dimitri Tiomkin.

clearly a genius. The Greek-chorus-like ballad-singer in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* is, I submit, a stroke of genius. I know that Tiomkin's own *High Noon* came first, but the technique is so much better practised in *Gunfight*: the tune itself is much better, lends itself more creatively to dramatic variation and elaboration, and the solo singer is most effectively 'shadowed' by a chorus of male voices (their whispered rhythmic repetitions of keywords in the 'Boot Hill' verse is particularly chilling). Such treatment imperceptibly adds cubits to the film's stature: it is not a mere Western but a myth of the West touched with the objective inevitability of classical tragedy.

The restraint of *Gunfight*. What an original concept! Flank it with *Lost Horizon* (Tiomkin's first major score) on the one hand and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* on the other, and you have his career and his contribution to cinema more or less in a nutshell. His consistency of development was remarkable: hardly an element of his later work but is foreshadowed in *Lost Horizon*, and hardly a one which doesn't relate to a basic common denominator, Tiomkin's Russianness. I am increasingly aware of it. He was at heart a late 19th century Russian nationalist romantic and brought many of their attitudes and characteristics to a totally unexpected, unforeseeable 20th century consummation in the cinema. A Russian artist's naturally compressed force and directness of expression is of great practical value in the film medium. His no less natural tendency to react more positively to colour and spectacle, concept or situation than to emotion or human relations, also serves Tiomkin to his great advantage.

It cannot be mere coincidence that most of his finest scores were written for films in which a love interest, if present at all, is so perfunctorily treated as to allow the composer to scamp it—think of Conway and Sondra in *Lost Horizon*, Wyatt Earp in *Gunfight*, Lucilla and Livius in *Roman Empire*; and in *Duel in the Sun*, as in *Giant*, the best music is undoubtedly inspired by the

grandeur and beauty of the Texan landscape.

One of the best scenes musically in *Lost Horizon* (though it can easily pass unnoticed since the music is all under dialogue) is the first interview between Conway and the High Lama, which Tiomkin handles almost as melodrama in the strict sense: the music is sensitive to, and unobtrusively supportive of, every nuance of emotion and import in the conversation. Human relations, in which Tiomkin is supposed to be less interested? Not really, for what they are discussing is a concept rather, the idea and ideals of Shangri-la. *Lost Horizon*, *The Big Sky*, *Giant*, *Land of the Pharaohs*, *The Alamo*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *Rhapsody of Steel*, *55 Days at Peking*, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*—for Tiomkin their real subjects were never heroes and their adventures but the spirit of people and their periods.

When the picture was of top quality Tiomkin's musical results could be staggering—*Roman Empire* is the supreme example. The sense of grandeur is surprisingly often unbombastic: the title music, for example, where Tiomkin massively and meaningfully juxtaposes three disparate instrumental groups: organ, symphony orchestra and brass choir. One masterful musical episode follows another—the enormously protracted, sunlit, sylvan calm which precedes Ballomar's first barbarian attack is one example. Another: the 'laughter of the gods' which the half-insane Commodus hears in the Temple of Jove. And the tremendous finale—the all-consuming conflagration in the Forum with its billowing clouds of smoke—is 'epic' music in the strict sense: having to do with epoch-making events in an elevated style. That is Tiomkin to a T.

The second NFT season will enable us to assess a far less familiar Tiomkin: the claustrophobic big-city nightmare of *D.O.A.* (a good film, by the way), the witty stylistic time-travelling of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the sustained symphonic hysteria of *The Steel Trap*. There may have been times when he failed to transcend convention, or in attempting to transcend it merely overstepped the bounds of dramatic propriety. Yet—as in the case of all film craftsmen destined to be remembered—there shows in Tiomkin's work not merely much competence but inspiration as well. He has star quality: when he makes music you have to listen, whether you like it or not. I am one of those who (for most of the time) likes it.

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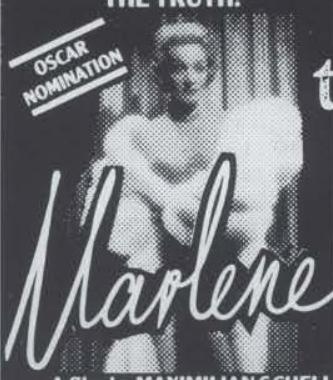
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Who goes to the cinema?

DAVID DOCHERTY / DAVID MORRISON / MICHAEL TRACEY

British Film Year, which has just ended, has seen a striking increase in cinema attendances, after the slump of 1984. But who now goes to the cinema, why do they go, and what in the 1980s is the significance of film as a social experience? The Broadcasting Research Unit is engaged on a major project, *The Entertainment Film in British Life*, for publication later this year. In this article, based on a paper they gave at the 1985 LFF, the researchers present some preliminary findings.

The questionnaire was constructed by the BRU and administered for them by NOP (National Opinion Polls) between 7-10 December 1984, using a representative quota sample of 795 people at 67 sampling points throughout Great Britain.

1985 was a curious year for the British film industry. It began with the biggest boost that the industry had had in decades: the startlingly good audience figures for January and February, some 50 per cent up on the same months in 1984. Later in the year came the announcement of the AMC multiplex in Milton Keynes, which stimulated new investment in the exhibition infrastructure. And British Film Year opened officially in March to much media trumpeting (although this did not prevent audience figures for the April-June quarter being rather worse than those in 1984). Against such initiatives could be set new legislation—the Films Act, Cinemas Act, Video Recordings Act and Copyright Act—which at the same time that it reduced government support for film erected a new structure of censorship. Obvious financial problems for the industry emerged towards the end of the year, with Goldcrest running into difficulty and Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment being saved only at the last moment from the hands of Golan/Globus. Another chill draught came with the warning from the study by the Heron group which indicated that the number

of video rentals was declining and the industry was moving into middle age.

Solutions aplenty were offered, but what strikes the outside observer is that too often problems and possible remedies for the industry have focused on the machinery of production and distribution and singularly failed to take into account the social experience of film. Why do some people watch films in the cinema, while most others do not? How does film fit into people's lives? Why is film usually spoken of in the context of the cinema audience, when the audience for films on TV and video cassette is vastly greater? There are now each year over a

billion viewings of films on video and around three billion of films on television, compared to the piffling 60 or 70 millions in the cinema.

Consider also the cold fact unearthed by our research, that when people are asked where they prefer to watch films, the majority opt for the television at home (Table 1). An industry seeking to reinvigorate itself cannot pretend that the 74 per cent of the adult population which did not go to the cinema in 1984 represented an unfortunate accident, easily remedied by Omar Sharif parachuting into the middle of Grantham at the behest of BRY. To be blunt: film viewing must be examined from within a framework offered by social analysis, and viewed as a set of practices rooted in the flux of people's lives, rather than as an aesthetic experience betrayed by the inadequacies of the structure of finance, production and distribution.

The disparity between the public image of film and the collapse of cinema-going has led in recent years to a resurgence of interest in broad-based market research on the audience. While these studies have legitimately focused on the immediate problems facing the

TABLE 1
Question: Which of these is the best way to watch a feature film?

	Total %	16-29 %	30-49 %	50+ %	AB %	C1 %	C2 %	DE %
Cinema	31	39	31	21	43	38	27	20
VCR	22	31	26	6	14	20	27	24
On TV	42	26	35	70	36	38	40	50
Don't know	6	4	9	2	7	4	7	6

A: Upper middle class. B: Middle class. C1: Lower middle class. C2: Skilled working class.
D: Working class. E: Those at lowest level of subsistence.

industry, they have often treated people as statistics wrapped in skins, and have therefore not provided sufficient insight into the part that film plays in the everyday lives of its users. By locating audiences in a context of family, work, friends and environment, we think we have developed a framework which makes sense of their choice of films as a leisure option.

One can, however, only really understand what is going on in the present by grasping what has happened in the past. In terms of the cinema audience, the five years 1980-84 saw the worst percentage drop since the terrible 1955-59 period (Table 2). The attendance upswing in 1985 is a percentage increase in relation to 1984: an overall increase of 35 per cent for the five months January-May. But 1984 was a particularly bad year even in a string of bad years. Most of our evidence points towards a product-led revival for the early months of 1985: Britain picked up on the clutch of major movies which had been doing boom business in the United States in 1984. In effect, the revival can be seen to be substantially the result of massive media promotion for four or five movies. The

Murphy is here pointing to the fact that discussion of the decline of the cinema is often wrapped up in half truths, excuses and genuine mistakes, and that understanding of the fluctuations in the cinema audience demands historical and sociological information.

Myths and memories

Two myths have informed much of the thinking in Britain about the audience decline: these we have called the myth of technological evolution and the myth of the universal audience (which has mutated in the minds of some producers into the 18-24 audience). The first myth states that cinema inexorably gave way to television as part of the development in the technology of delivering visual entertainment, and that cinema has therefore been fighting a losing battle against the tide of history. The second myth states that once upon a time everyone went to the cinema, and that the way forward is an indiscriminate attempt to lure them all back.

During the 1950s, television appeared to be the obvious enemy, and most of the attention of researchers and commentators was focused on the TV/cinema relationship. There were good reasons for this, in that to all intents and purposes television inhabited the same terrain as the cinema: it was visual; it was entertainment-based; and it was constantly expanding as cinema was declining. Producers and exhibitors vainly fought television on the technological plane: CinemaScope, Cinerama, 3-D and to a certain extent colour were all fundamentally misconceived efforts to keep the small, scratchy, black and white sets at bay. As we now know, the quality of the picture did not bear much relation to the wishes of the audience.

Superficially, however, the case seemed clear. The number of television licences increased from 3 million in 1951 to 9 million in 1958, and the cinema audience declined from 1,300 million to 755 million during the same period. The connection seemed obvious, and proven: the audience was simply staying at home and watching television. But the problem with this approach is that it is based on a sketchy reading of the evidence. A common assumption in the late 1950s was that every new TV licence holder meant a loss of about 65 ticket sales a year for the cinema. By this reading, 9 million TV licences should have meant a drop of 585 million in cinema attendances from the pre-television 1940s. In fact by 1958 audiences had dropped by 900 million. The 65 ticket-sale figure was based on the assumption that everyone in a household was affected in the same way by television, ignoring the fact that the most regular cinemagoers were young people, whose commitment to television would be less strong. If you say that each TV licence cost only 40 cinema attendances you might be nearer the mark. And on that basis, television would account for

no more than 40 per cent of the 900 million audience decline.

Just as television was blamed in the 1950s, VCRs have been held responsible for the decline in cinema attendance in the early 1980s. The fact of the matter is that neither of these technologically based explanations is adequate to explain why the long-term decline in attendances has been so much worse in the UK than in any other country. In the United States, for instance, television is watched at least as much as it is in Britain, and the use of VCRs is increasing. The American film industry, however, is now relatively stable, with attendances of around 1 billion to 1.3 billion a year: a ratio of population size to ticket sales of something like 1:5. In Britain, the ratio is only about 1:1.

A reason for the pessimism in Britain is that in many cases technological arguments are assumed to be sociological arguments. It is easy to see an evolution of technology in the shift from music hall to cinema and radio, from cinema to television, from broadcast television to VCR, satellite and cable. But technology does not exist in a vacuum. Technological determinism disguises the significance of social changes, and therefore what needs stressing is that cinema closures were not part of a technology-driven, inevitable process. Rather than simply restate the causal connection between cinema and television, it is more accurate to say that the rise in television was caused by the same process underlying the decline in cinema attendance. Just as the conditions for the cinema emerged during one phase of industrial capitalism, which created a working class concentrated in large industrial conglomerations, with leisure time and a financial surplus, so the conditions for television were created by the rise in real wages, comfortable homes, the emergence of the concept of the nuclear family concurrent with the break-up of the working-class extended family. It is important that we are not seduced by the technological arguments; but it is also vital that we are not mesmerised by Hovis-type memories of the past.

The second myth, that of the universal audience, states that in the 1940s and 50s the regular cinema audience was a cross-section of the population. In fact, the regular audience consisted largely of the urban working class, which accounted for about 80 per cent of total cinema attendances in the 1950s. This myth meant that in many ways the industry missed the most important aspect of the decline in cinema attendance, namely the cultural shifts and changing material world of the audience upon which it depended.

The development of a consumer culture, with its emphasis on consumer durables and its focus on the home, squeezed the amount of leisure surplus available and shifted the emphasis of expenditure on leisure. Similarly, the emergence of a youth culture, with its leisure options of music, cafés and so on, was portrayed, badly, in the occasional

TABLE 2
Quinquennial percentage decline in the UK cinema audience

	%
1950-54	7
1955-59	51
1960-64	32
1965-69	34
1970-74	28
1975-79	3
1980-84	48

crunch will come when the British market inherits a less successful run of pictures from the States—where attendances dropped by as much as 15 per cent in the first part of 1985. Only then can we properly evaluate whether the 1985 increase in Britain is likely to last, and the part played in it by British Film Year, by pricing structures and other factors.

Writing recently in *Variety*, A. D. Murphy, a perceptive commentator on the American scene, suggested that in the United States, 'Domestic ticket sales have been oscillating above and below a level of slightly more than one billion annual tickets since 1961. The 1982-84 period was one of these regular above-average periods which are followed inexorably by a couple of slow years. That's what's happening now, as it happened before—when there were no VCRs to blame (or some other convenient excuse for the glut of junk films). These periodic recessions seem to last about 18 months (fall 1975 to spring 1977 and fall 1979 to spring 1981—to name the previous two slumps). The current decline began last January [1985]. With luck it will be over before next summer; without luck, not until Christmas 1986.'

film, but the management of the industry did not adequately perceive that this very culture was as dangerous to the cinema as the processes which were making people stay at home to watch television. Studies have shown that of all sectors of the population those aged between 16-24 watched television the least, and yet it was this group which was the primary cinema audience. With the arrival of a distinctive youth culture, the cinema no longer fitted so easily into the leisure and social world of this age group. Slowly, surely and inexorably they drifted away, and with them went many of the fortunes of the film industry. Also of crucial importance was the transformation of the inner city, as the working class during the 1950s moved out to the new housing estates. This not only broke the connection between that generation and the cinema, but because the cinema was no longer a part of the fabric of the working class community it broke the link with future generations.

Of course, there are and have been several alternatives offered by the industry to the idea of the universal audience, but these are also based on generalising a particular assumption about the audience. In the 40s, for instance, there was a view that the cinema was of interest primarily to women, whereas the actual figures showed that the number of men and women in the audience has always been roughly equal. Similarly, the current preoccupation with the 18-24 age group ignores the fact that, although they constitute the core of regular attenders, the family audience is also an extremely important component in a healthy cinema. Families may only attend the cinema a couple of times a year, but they swell the numbers for the blockbusters, and they introduce children to the cinema. The important point is that cinema attendance is related to the rhythms of social life rather than to the product on offer, and that just as there are a variety of leisure demands so there are a set of fragmented relations with the cinema, and therefore a set of different kinds of audience. It is social background, income and lifestyle that produce the framework within which these various segments can be understood.

Cinema as leisure

Basically, the audience for all audio-visual culture and entertainment is fragmenting. What is not yet totally clear is how that restructuring will affect the cinema. Will the cinema follow the trajectory of the theatre and become a largely middle-class leisure pursuit, with the working class no longer really involved in film as a public experience? We are at the crossroads, and we need an interpretative framework to understand what is happening. Who attends the cinema, when and how often? Why do they attend, and why do they like what they like?

Cinema-going is above all a leisure

pursuit. Regardless of the cultural value of the cinema, in leisure terms it is no different from going to the pub or to the zoo. It is related to an individual's life-cycle, to perceptions of cost, and to wider social movements in the nature of institutions like the family, and fundamentally it is related to the nature of work.

A useful way of analysing the relationship between life-cycle and leisure is to see it in terms of push and pull factors. At certain times in the life-cycle, push factors such as the presence of children exert pressure on parents. Something has to be found for the children to do at weekends and during school holidays—i.e., the push factors are a set of *leisure demands* which emerge from structural factors. The pull factors are *leisure possibilities*, such as the appearance of a blockbuster film, a favourite soccer team having a run in the Cup, or a pregnant giant panda at the London Zoo. These shape, but in general do not cause, a leisure demand. People do not go to the cinema, on the whole, because the film has pulled them out of their homes; they go because they want to go out and the film has enough clout to channel this leisure demand in its direction.

The British cinema audience can be seen as divided between the pool of those who attend occasionally and the regular attenders. The pool consists of those who went to the cinema at least once in the past year, which according to our figures was 26 per cent of the adult population (of which 59 per cent went one to three times). The regular attenders are those who went once a month or more: on our figures, 7 per cent. It should be stressed that these figures are for those people who go at all: 74 per cent of the adult population did not visit the cinema.

As can be seen from table three, there are some key differences be-

tween the cinema audience and the national population. For instance, single people double their representation in the pool and increase by a multiplier of four among regular attenders; married couples drop by over one-fifth in the pool and by around two-thirds in the regular attendance figures. It is interesting to note in passing that the widowed—6 per cent of the population—make up only 1 per cent of the pool, something that has serious implications for the cinema in an ageing population. As far as age and class go, the figures show that a section of the traditional young working-class audience remains: although only 19 per cent of the DES attended the cinema, compared to 36 per cent of the ABS, a substantially *higher* proportion were regular attenders.

The important point about the pool is that it shows where the audience is drawn from, and where the potential for increase might be. It also confirms that the irregular audience is becoming an increasingly important category for the industry. The difference for the industry between a good year and a poor one largely depends on the handful of films which attract that 59 per cent of the pool who go to the cinema between one and three times a year. There is a sense in which this irregular audience makes the difference between near-healthy attendance figures and absolute decline. In a bad year, the irregular audience might make up as much as 40 per cent of the total.

There is, for example, a strong seasonal bias in cinema attendance, the peak periods being the school holidays at Christmas and in the summer. At the same time, audiences over these two periods are the most erratic in absolute terms, and the reason for this unpredictability lies with the decline of the

TABLE 3
UK Cinema attendance

a) by marital status

	Adult pop. %	Pool* %	Regular %
Single	18	36	74
Married	70	56	26
Separated	1	1	
Divorced	4	4	
Widowed	6	1	

b) by class

	Adult pop. %	Pool %	Regular %
AB	16	22	17
C1	28	30	37
C2	27	26	19
DE	29	22	26

c) by age

	Adult pop. %	Pool %	Regular %
16-29	29	48	80
30-39	26	30	13
40+	44	21	6

* Those going to the cinema at least once a year.
Totals do not add up to 100 because of rounding.

regular audience and the rise of the fragmented audience. It is during these periods that the push factors which create the conditions for leisure demand are at their height; in particular children act as the catalyst for the cinema visits of a large proportion of adults. The pull factors depend on the attractiveness of the films on offer: in some years (1984) the films are simply not up to the task; in other years (1985) they are. In other words, although social factors are the most important determinants of cinema attendance, the actual pull factor of a given film or of the whole cinematic experience must also operate to increase attendances or to prevent them from falling.

It is apparent from our evidence that the act of choosing which film to see is itself structured by the reasons for going to see it. If one is only going in order to satisfy the children, then the children are the most important component in the choice of the film. Something of the significance of this can be seen in the fact that only 28 per cent of married people say that they prefer to watch films in the cinema. We are therefore left with the strong impression that marriage and regular cinema-going do not mix—that even when the push and pull factors combine to get married people into the cinema, in most cases they have not themselves chosen the films they have come to see.

This is not the case with the most important group among the regular attenders: those between the ages of 18-24 who have a steady relationship. Of this group, 54 per cent attended the cinema in 1984. This is the only group in which a majority claimed to go to the cinema and it also provides the most regular attenders. (It should be remembered, of course, that almost half this group *did not* go to the cinema even once during the year.) The push factor, in this case, is wanting to get out of the house, or to find a leisure pursuit which fits in with the demand to see one another regularly. Of young couples, 63 per cent claimed that they only went to the cinema with their boy/girlfriend. Cinema-going is still part of the ritual of courting and remains a safe bet for a night out, with most of the couples also going to a pub (two-thirds), having a meal out (20 per cent) or having some kind of takeaway meal (one-third). By comparison, of those aged 16-29 who are unattached, 44 per cent went to the cinema in the last year and 15 per cent are regular attenders, which is double the score for married people and about half the score for courting couples.

TABLE 4
Reasons for having video

	Total	AB	C1	C2	DE
W-base Have video	793	128	219	215	231
	268	52	69	92	55
	34%	41%	31%	43%	24%
Reasons for getting VCR					
W-base	391	76	100	134	81
	%	%	%	%	%
Tape films	46 (45)*	40 (37)	54 (50)	45 (48)	43 (44)
Tape other programmes	61 (53)	77 (63)	63 (53)	54 (49)	57 (48)
Hire films	45 (30)	43 (18)	43 (32)	46 (31)	50 (37)
Too much rubbish on TV	13	11	9	13	19

* Figures in brackets: main use of video now.

Percentages do not add up to 100 because of multiple choice.

W-base: Weighted base: A statistical technique for making a sample representative of the population as a whole.

One should not imagine, however, that our courting couples are especially enamoured of the cinema. They want easy, cheap entertainment and therefore attend the cinema regularly, but they still feel it is too expensive for what it offers them. Even this audience, on whom the pull and push factors are operating most powerfully, are not satisfied with what they get, nor are they committed to the cinema. When they marry, with a change in the needs and interests that create leisure behaviour, the drop in attendance is abrupt. And nothing short of a miracle will turn a working-class father of two young children into someone who attends the cinema on a regular basis.

The Video age?

Before considering the exact role of video in people's lives, it is worth making a general point about attitudes to film. For example, 80 per cent of the population agreed that, 'If a film is good, I don't mind where I watch it.' Taken on its own that is interesting, but what one wishes to know, as with most survey questions, is its social significance. If most people don't mind where they watch films, then clearly any claim for a special institutional setting for film—traditionally known as the cinema—is reduced. And that is the problem cinema faces; a

problem which is not new, but which has been made more acute by video. A further twist which we uncovered in our research was that those who actually go to the cinema are slightly more likely to agree that the setting doesn't matter than the rest. Paradoxically, this is because they enjoy film more. For instance, 56 per cent of cinema-goers rated feature films as their favourite TV programmes compared to only 37 per cent of those who had not been to a cinema. In this sense, the very popularity of film is the cinema's own enemy, making it a victim of its own product.

That, however, is not the end of the question. When pressed further, it transpired that most people actually prefer to watch films at home. Only 31 per cent considered the cinema to be 'the best way to watch feature films', with 22 per cent choosing VCR and 42 per cent television. Taking only those who possessed a video, 33 per cent plumped for cinema compared with 40 per cent for VCR. It is not therefore that individuals regret they do not go to the cinema more often, like some 'bad Catholic' who intends to go to church, never quite makes it but prays at home. They don't want to go to the cinema and for them the best place to watch films is the home. Why is this? The answer rests in what people do with their TVs and VCRs and the reasons they give for doing it.

Cinema and film are not inseparable;

TABLE 5

Question: 'If a film is good I don't mind where I watch it.'

	Total %	16-29 %	30-49 %	50+ %	AB %	C1 %	C2 %	DE %	Been to cinema in year %	Not been to cinema in year %
Agree	80	85	78	69	80	83	74	80	82	78
Disagree	15	11	16	20	13	14	23	15	14	16
No opinion	5	3	6	5	6	4	6	4	4	5

one can love film separately from the cinema. What needs to be examined is the manner of the love-making. For example, those who preferred to watch films in the cinema noted as a main reason the environmental aspect of atmosphere. Those who preferred to watch films on video did so because they appreciated being able to control their environment. Only 7 per cent gave choice of film as their reason for preferring video, against 63 per cent nominating 'freedom to watch when you want'. And 37 per cent named 'chance to stop/rewind'.

The act of stopping a film part way through to break the narrative, or rewinding and repeating the action, contravenes all the rules of 'how' to watch film. But those rules are the product not so much of the form as of a cinematic history which demanded that films be viewed in a certain way. Video has changed all that, and what previously appeared as artistic imperatives can now be seen as no more than house rules dictated by the public character of the performance. The rhythms people create for themselves are extensions of everyday routines, not efforts to re-establish the special patterns of the cinema. Only 11 per cent, for instance, turn off the light when showing a video; only 2 per cent take the telephone off the hook. For the overwhelming majority, the film is firmly placed within the context and exigencies of the home and its enjoyment is part of that setting, not something that requires adding to as is the case with the film at the cinema. A 'night in' is not a 'night out spent at home'. For example, whereas 26 per cent of cinema-goers usually accompanied such a visit by having a takeaway meal, only 6 per cent said that they did so when renting a video.

But if cinema is no longer the most popular venue for film, what remains inescapable is the popularity of film itself. Despite the number of feature films shown every week on television, 40 per cent of the general public nevertheless consider that there are too few. Only 7 per cent think there are too many. From all of which, the lesson appears to be that the falling away of cinema audiences has been accompanied by the demise of what were believed to be the special features of the public viewing of film. This demise, we have to add, appears to have left few mourners.

We explored the comparison between film in the cinema and film on video in other ways. If the habit of prayer and church attendance is in decline, spiritual leaders tend to look to a spiritual explanation. Equally, the cinema as a commercial enterprise will tend to look for commercial answers to what are assumed to be commercial questions (why have people stopped attending, because the tickets cost too much, therefore cut the ticket price). A major question which we had to ask in our research concerned the relative costs of cinema, video and other leisure activities.

Compared to the price of a cinema

ticket, video hire is cheap; but then the price of a ticket is not particularly high. Cinema is objectively a relatively inexpensive form of entertainment. Why then should only half of those who went to the cinema in the past year consider it good value? And why should a third actually consider the cinema bad value—and we emphasise that this is among those who attended? Even among the more regular attenders—those who go four times a year or more—25 per cent thought the cinema poor value. Why did they not go to the cinema more often? Only 14 per cent gave poor quality of films as the reason, compared with 40 per cent whose reason was cost. Very few, therefore, question the quality of the product, but they do question the price they have to pay for it.

In sharp contrast, almost 83 per cent of our survey saw the hiring of video films as representing good value compared to other forms of entertainment. The most common rental charge for a video was one pound, against two pounds to two pounds fifty for the cinema. But people spend more than this when they go to the pub or the wine bar. Why, then, do they regard cinema as expensive? The likely reason is that for most people (some two-thirds) a visit to a cinema also involves a meal out or a drink. This is particularly the case with the most frequent attenders—the 18-24 age group—and they were also the people most likely to mention the cost of film-going. The problem for the industry is that the cinemagoer is not willing to forgo these other pleasures in order to go out to see more films.

For most of those who go, a visit to the cinema is a social activity, and the cinema itself is only part of the evening out. When a film is hired on video, it is the film pure and simple that is enjoyed and not some experience wider than the home can provide. And this is an extension of the truth about television: that it fits superbly into the dominant pattern of life in modern Britain, a pattern which centres overwhelmingly on the home.

Conclusion

How then to draw the threads together? We would be the first to admit that we do not have the answers to the future of the cinema, and we would stress that these are our preliminary findings. We have a vast amount of data which we are still researching, and all we have been able to offer in the space available is a series of dips into that data, and a series of judgments by us as to what it means. In arriving at these judgments—which will be spelled out in greater detail in our forthcoming book, *The Entertainment Film in British Life*—we have simply tried to be honest and balanced and not to make the all too frequent error of allowing the wish to be father to the thought. Our main argument is that it is not enough to understand film; one must also understand people and their propensities.

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Anglo-

Nanou

Nanou: a cross-Channel love affair, a first feature written and directed by Conny Templeman: photographer Martin Führer, editor Tom Priestley, music John Keane and co-producer Patrick Sandrin. An Umbrella-Caulfield/Arion film, produced by Simon Perry for the National Film Finance Corporation, the French Ministry of Culture and its UK distributor Curzon Films. September release.

Above: Maulnes, eastern France:
Luc (Jean-Philippe Ecoffey) and
Nanou (Imogen Stubbs).

Left: Max (Daniel Day Lewis),
the English friend.

Below left: Nanou and Luc,
domestic claustrophobia.

Below: Nanou and, at her mushrooms,
Mme Girault (Anne-Marie Jabraud).

Nanou photographs:
ERIC CARO.



French

Hôtel du Paradis

Hôtel du Paradis: a Parisian hotel, the disappointments of the world, a comedy of exile by documentarist Jana Bokova: photographer Gérard de Battista, editor Bill Shapter, music Rodolfo Mederos. An Umbrella-Portman film, produced by Simon Perry for Channel 4, London Trust Productions and Antenne 2. Both films will be previewed in London at the National Film Theatre in May.



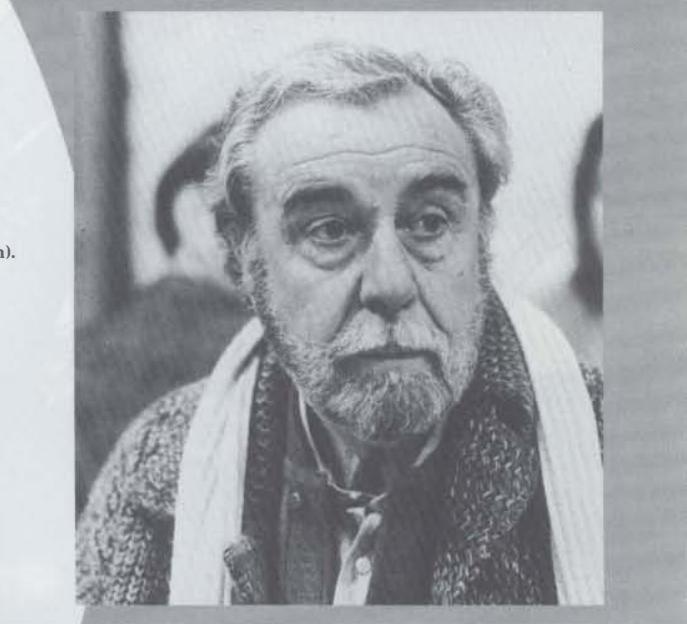
Above: Timeless Paris:
Arthur (Fabrice Luchini),
the would be film-maker.

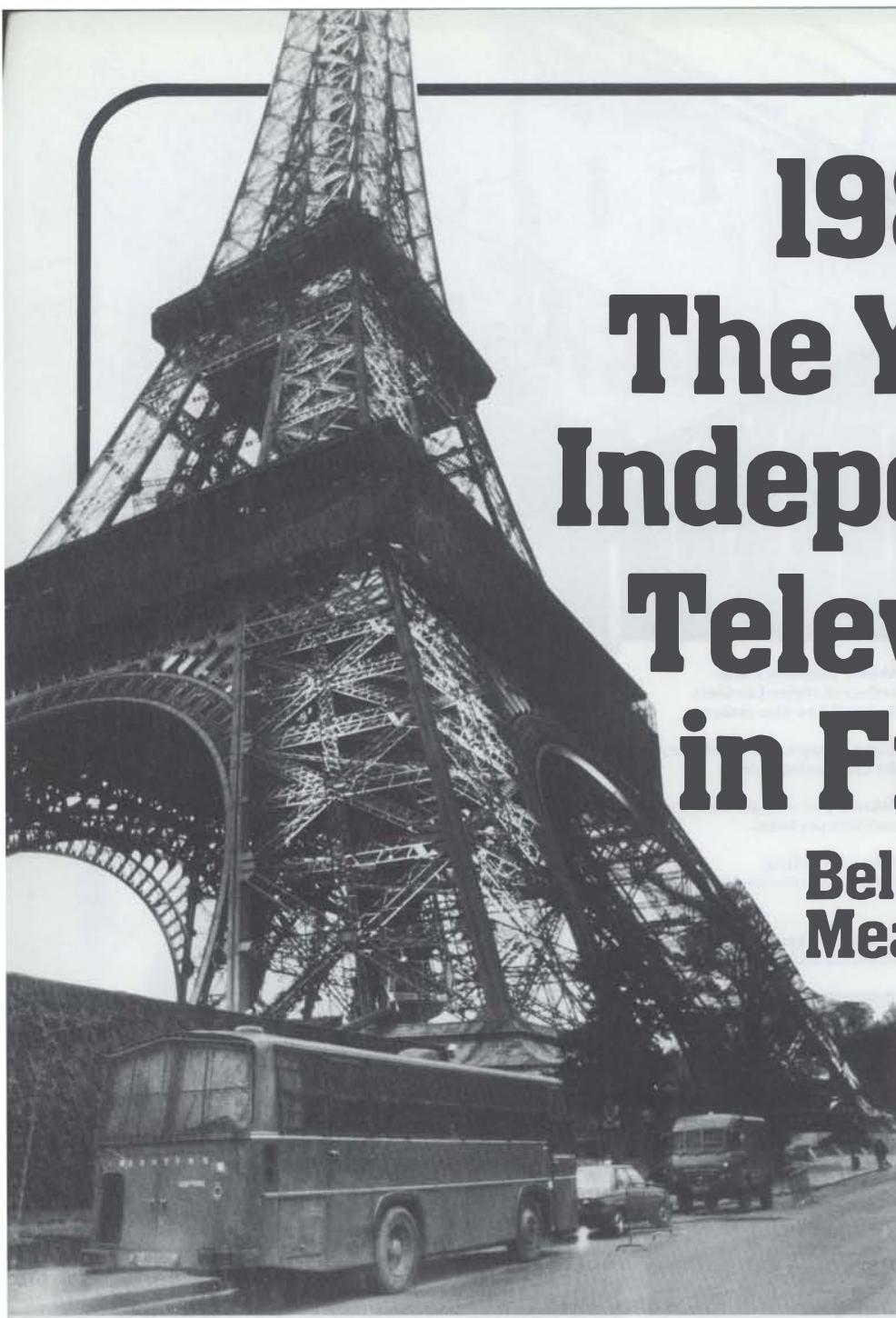
Right: Joseph (Fernando Rey),
the Lithuanian actor.

Below right: Joseph and Arthur,
partners perhaps.

Below: In hiding,
Frédérique (Bérangère Bonvoisin).

Hôtel du Paradis photographs:
MONICA DOUEK.





1986: The Year of Independent Television in France

**Belinda
Meares**

The Eiffel Tower:
Police protection for TDF engineers.

When France's Socialist government came to power on 10 May 1981, it was committed to a wide-ranging programme of social reforms, not least of which was the liberalisation of the nation's airwaves. In fact, ever since Giscard d'Estaing dismantled the ORTF ('The Voice of France') in 1974, it had seemed that global advances in communications technology would inevitably push his successors towards the acceptance of independent broadcasting. In the late 1970s, many commercial video companies had been founded and were investing heavily in prospective production. (Today, only a handful of these enterprises are still significant; the rest have gone out of business or have turned their inventive talents to the more functional servicing of schools, municipalities or business firms.) The late 70s also saw the heyday of pirate radio, and by the time the Socialists arrived in office the campaign for

'radios libres' was well advanced.

Rather than attempt to enforce the unpopular state monopoly against growing odds, the government lifted the ban on the FM radio band in 1982. In July the same year, it created the Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle, an autonomous body of nine members (three of whom are state appointees) whose official function is to apply the new broadcasting regulations. In practice, the board serves as a buffer between the government and the clamorous audio-visual lobbies, lending a veneer of independence to the development of broadcasting in France. Its first task was to allocate permanent frequencies to the more acceptable 'radios libres', sending the non-conformists back to the limbo of illegality or oblivion.

As for television, in de Gaulle's time it was subordinate to radio and unashamedly exploited as a political

medium by the powers in place. After the troubles of May 68, however, a series of administrative scandals and staff purges made it obvious that the ORTF was no longer manageable. Reform came with the arrival of Pompidou's successor, Giscard, who did not hesitate to attack the Gaullist establishment by splintering the broadcasting structure into seven separate entities: a production company (SFP), a telediffusion service (TDF), two state radio channels and three national television channels, one of which is charged with co-ordinating the regional networks. Based in Paris, FR3 has a weak impact on local communities, but both TF1 and Antenne 2 have come into their own since their timid beginnings. Although France's television service is still subject to government pressure, it exerts an influence over the political class which would have been unimaginable fifteen years ago. Slowly but surely, state control has been giving ground to corporate protectionism in the broadcasting milieu. When Antenne 2's popular newsreader, Christine Ockrent, felt obliged to resign last year in protest against political interference in the running of the channel, the scandal reactivated the debate about the desirability of independent television.

Only a few months before this unfortunate incident, the Socialist

government had made a positive gesture when on 4 November 1984 it licensed France's first private subscription channel, Canal Plus. After a precarious first year of existence, the enterprise has scraped through into solvency thanks to its popular fare of films, TV films, sports and a smattering of news. Because the majority of the films it shows are French (60 per cent), Canal Plus has the support of the French film industry, something which has helped the channel weather its financial crises and resist the hostility of some professionals in public television.

In the annals of French broadcasting, 1985 will go down as the year of no turning back. In January, the Prime Minister, Laurent Fabius, made a solemn announcement that independent, commercial television would be a reality by Christmas. Sceptics held their tongues, while Jean-Denis Bredin, a lawyer who in 1982 had produced a notable report on the French film industry, worked in collaboration with TDF (Télédiffusion de France) to draw up a comprehensive survey of the 'hertzian landscape'. His report, which was delivered in May, envisaged the creation of two national channels and some forty local ones, all to be entirely dependent on advertising and sponsorship revenue. The state service, TDF, was to retain its monopoly over the means of broadcasting. Following appropriate legislation, the Haute Autorité was to be empowered to allocate the local frequencies, but the government should retain the right to nominate the holders of national concessions.

Reactions to the Bredin report were mixed. Although the scheme was generally approved, questions were raised about the TDF monopoly. Did TDF, for instance, intend to impose its inflated public service tariffs on the financially disadvantaged private channels? The question of advertising was also raised. It has always been a rule in France that TV commercials should be restricted to the breaks between programmes, and the Bredin report upheld this condition. Potential operators, however, were convinced that no commercial channel, whether national or local, would be viable unless the restriction was lifted. From the opposite quarter, cries of alarm were heard from the regional press, which feared that a large share of its advertising revenue would be appropriated by the new local channels.

Despite these reservations, the months following the Bredin report saw an upsurge in enthusiasm, as the interminable campaign for independent television seemed at last about to reach its goal. In an atmosphere of suspense and determined optimism, prospective operators grouped together for financial consolidation and embarked on hectic programme planning. Not to be left out of the picture, the state itself revealed a project for a publicly run 'cultural' channel to be broadcast throughout Europe via France's television satellite, TDF1, which has yet to be launched.

'Canal 1', as it is to be called, is the brainchild of Pierre Desgraupes, a former director of Antenne 2. In his outline scheme for the channel, published in July 1985, Desgraupes expressed the familiar French conviction that Europe needs to parry the American cultural invasion. His ideal would be a kind of European 'club', which would exchange original programmes and finance co-productions. There would also be direct broadcasts of plays, opera, concerts, supra-national debates and the like.

Meanwhile, at some remove from such high-minded concerns, the contenders for the two national concessions were in July sent back to their starting blocks. The Minister of Communications, Georges Filioud, made the bulk of the Bredin report official but failed to give any indication of who the eventual operators of the channels would be. What he did propose was a distinction between the channels: one was to be 'mainly musical' while the other would cater for more general tastes. Potential operators objected, arguing that the 'mainly musical' channel would not be able to attract enough advertising revenue to survive. Opposition politicians also moved in, criticising the scheme as a Socialist ploy to 'neutralise' one of the channels. Nevertheless, by October it seemed that the musical channel might be the front-runner, if only for the reason that its suitors were not legion. The likely starter was a joint venture formed by the radio company Europe 1, the advertising concern Publicis and Gaumont, France's leading film distributor.

In any event, progress was stalled in late October because of a political rumpus about the future of the direct communications satellite, TDF1, which at

that time was scheduled for launching in July 1986. The origin of the problem dated back to 1984, when an agreement was reached between the governments of France and Luxembourg which accorded a major role in the financing and use of TDF1 to the Compagnie Luxembourgeoise de Télédiffusion (CLT). In return, Luxembourg renounced a satellite project of its own. Believing himself to be in a position of strength, Jacques Rigaud, director of CLT, apparently began to show waning enthusiasm for acting as a major supplier of funds for the costly French satellite. He was confident that he would in any case be allocated two of TDF1's four channels, by virtue of his organisation's solidity and European competence. (CLT runs RTL, a French peripheral station which broadcasts over the Lorraine region, and RTL-Plus, a German-language station.)

Relations between the independently minded M Rigaud and the French government deteriorated when it became obvious that the CLT was also the most serious candidate for the 'general' fifth channel. The French authorities first tried to persuade Rigaud to accept a merger with Télé Monte Carlo (TMC), France's second peripheral station. Partly owned by the French state through its public holding company SOFIRAD, Télé Monte Carlo is none the less in constant financial difficulties. Inevitably, the CLT baulked at the idea of being linked with such a partner, and the negotiations stagnated. Meanwhile, the government was busy undermining CLT's interests on a second front. M Jacques Pomonti of the Institut National de la Communication Audiovisuelle (INA) was commissioned by the Minister of Communications to look elsewhere for investors for the satellite, and two weighty outsiders were soon netted, in

A cartoon by Cabu from the *Canard Enchaîné*, 27 November 1985.
Reproduced by kind permission.



Britain's Robert Maxwell and the Italian Silvio Berlusconi.

For the CLT, the penny dropped at last. With his foot in the door of the French satellite, Berlusconi lost no time in announcing his candidature for the 'general interest' ground channel. Rigaud was forced to fight a determined rearguard action; he even went so far as to propose an alliance with CLT's rival Europe 1, which was fast losing faith in the 'musical' channel. Stupefaction and a shudder of foreboding ran through the audio-visual community in France. The long-awaited infant of independent television was in danger of being stillborn, victim of politico-corporate machinations.

To all self-respecting film and television professionals in France, moreover, the name of Berlusconi is anathema. Rightly or wrongly, he is held responsible for 'assassinating' Italian cinema and degrading Italian television with the rubbishy programmes which make his three national channels such a hit. Nor are Berlusconi's partners in the French venture regarded more kindly, since their appearance in the private media business is felt to smack of political favouritism. Jérôme Seydoux, director of Chargeurs Réunis (the corporation which owns UTA Airlines) and brother of Nicolas Seydoux, the president of Gaumont, is one of the wealthiest men in France. He is also a major shareholder and former executive in Schlumberger, the French multinational whose president was the late Jean Riboud, friend of François Mitterrand and avid partisan of the Socialists' programme for independent television. It therefore comes as no surprise that the third partner in the Berlusconi team is a younger member of the dynasty, Christophe Riboud, who will inject Schlumberger finance into the venture.

On ideological grounds, the all-Europe finance of this Italo-French combination appeared a powerful trump card to the decision-makers at the Elysée, who were concerned to guard against a backdoor entry for the American networks. The CLT, on the other hand, cultivates dangerous relations with Rupert Murdoch, who also has interests in the French firms Filipacchi and Hachette (both, as it happened, edged out of the running for a concession at an early date). The dilemma for the Socialists, or more precisely for President Mitterrand, was to make the best of a philistine choice between American finance and American culture. It cannot have been ignored that Berlusconi's Italian channels are awash with American serials and Hollywood re-runs; but the considerable capital (60 per cent) proposed by the two indigenous investors, Chargeurs Réunis and Schlumberger, must have tipped the scales in Berlusconi's favour.

Before the concession could be granted, however, there was a hurdle of monumental proportions to be cleared. With the deadline of the French general election in March fast approaching, it



Left to right: Christophe Riboud, Silvio Berlusconi, Jérôme Seydoux.

became a matter of urgency to establish the location and frequency for the new channel's transmitter. Naturally, the engineers of TDF chose the Eiffel Tower, the highest structure in Paris. Unfortunately for them, the Opposition mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, wanted to reserve the coveted frequency for his 'local' channel and systematically refused to let the Tower's trustees negotiate with TDF. In response to this intransigence, the government reacted by introducing a law which gives the public services (which include TDF) right of access to all edifices over 200 metres high. Hollering 'liberticide', Chirac and his fellow deputies contested the constitutionality of this law by bringing it before the Conseil d'Etat for examination. This august body upheld the government's action and negotiations with the Tower's trustees were resumed, though not without further hazards. The trustees began a 'security overhaul' of the Tower which threatened more delay, and on one occasion the TDF engineers had to call on police reinforcements to gain access to the summit.

With the battle for the monument won, however, it remained no more than a formality for the authorities to announce who would be operating France's fifth television channel. On a day that will go down in memory, 19 November 1985, a strategic slice of the nation's airwaves was signed over to Jérôme Seydoux and Silvio Berlusconi. Joining the CLT at the

head of the mourners was virtually the entire French film fraternity, which condemned the decision as an unforgivable blow to the cinema. Distributors, producers, writers and stars vowed to boycott Berlusconi. The Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, admitted that he had played no part in the negotiations over 'la Cinq' and promised the film-makers that he would ask for the terms of the contract to be reconsidered. President Mitterrand suggested that the 'cahier des charges' might be modified after discussions with the film-makers.

Another person nursing a grievance since the signing of 'la Cinq' is Jacques Pomonti, who, it will be recalled, was instructed to round up investors for the TDFI satellite. In his haste to conclude the agreement with Berlusconi, M Fillioud actually managed to torpedo Pomonti's mission, which was apparently on the point of bearing fruit. On the same occasion that he was accorded the fifth channel concession, Berlusconi was also signed up for a satellite channel, at the low rental of 55 million francs as opposed to the original estimate of 130 million. Also at the signing was the other candidate for a satellite channel, Robert Maxwell, who came away from his meeting with M Fillioud equally satisfied. No mention was made of the earlier arrangement, by which Berlusconi and Maxwell would have put up 30 per cent of the capital costs of the satellite. Lacking funds and plagued by technical setbacks, this

ambitious project has been postponed until 1987, when it will run into direct competition from Germany's TV-Sat, which is also due for launching next year.

Back on ground level, the CLT is counter-attacking by appealing to the Conseil d'Etat against the arbitrary manner in which the fifth channel concession was granted. Another appeal has been lodged by the Bureau de Liaison des Industries Cinématographiques (BLIC), which argues that standard audio-visual regulations have been disregarded, giving 'la Cinq' unfair advantages over the other channels. A closer look at the terms of the contract and the 'cahier des charges' (guidelines) does indeed reveal indications that the arrangements are intended to be irreversible.

The concession is granted for a period of eighteen years and is renewable. In the event of any modifications in the conditions of the concession or the 'cahier des charges', the holder of the concession is entitled to compensation for additional costs entailed or for loss of revenue. Should the present situation of private television change beyond the contract's predictions, the concession holder will have the right to cancel the contract, with indemnification, or to claim counter-balancing compensations. (In this context, mention is made of Canal Plus and of the advent of local channels and of a second national channel with a 50 per cent music content.) The above condition also applies to any increase in the publicity resources of the state channels, which should be held to their present level. Another clause guarantees indemnification in the event of a private takeover of one or more of the public channels. Finally, TDF is bound to make available the best transmission facilities at its disposal, giving 'la Cinq' priority over the requirements of any TV channel which may be licensed at a later date.

These conditions, and their strikingly watertight appearance, suggest the pressure on President Mitterrand to find a politically safe solution to the 'problem' of independent television before the fateful election date of 16 March. Stealing a march on the Opposition, the President has erected a barrier of protections around the channel which will make it difficult for anyone to dismantle 'la Cinq'—provided, of course, that it has managed to broadcast by the date laid down, 20 February. In its initial period, the new channel will reach 8 million households, with its coverage projected to be 28 million by the end of the year. When all its transmitters are in place, it will touch 80 per cent of French territory—far in excess of the estimates in the Bredin report, which envisaged a division of 19 million and 17 million households for the fifth and sixth channels respectively.

At the end of January, the concession for the sixth channel was granted to an all-French partnership: Gaumont, Publicis, the Gilbert Gross advertising agency and the private radio station NRJ.

The channel is intended to appeal to a young (12-35) age group. Its programme content should be at least 50 per cent musical. Like the fifth, the new channel will rely for its revenue solely on publicity and sponsorship, but its conditions ('cahier des charges') are slightly more strict. It will be able to interrupt its programmes with commercials, but will have to observe a 50 per cent quota of French films from its first year. Also, 30 per cent of the sixth's programmes should be French in the first year, reaching 50 per cent after three years (five years for the fifth). With an initial budget of 300 million francs (a quarter of that for the 'general interest' channel), the sixth aimed to be broadcasting ten hours a day by the end of February. It will initially touch 18 million viewers, with 25 million the ultimate goal. Director of the sixth will be the President of Publicis, Maurice Lévy.

The decision about the sixth channel, however, does not mean that the final whistle has blown. There has been further jockeying for position on the French audio-visual scene following a Presidential hint that the state is prepared to part with SOFIRAD, the public holding company which has interests in both Europe 1 and Télé Monte Carlo. Whether SOFIRAD goes or not, firm takeover offers for TMC have been made by Berlusconi-Seydoux and by an outsider, Jean-Marc Berger of STV (Satellite TéléVision). Allied with a solid financier in the construction business, Bouygues SA*, Berger's project for a mixed cable-satellite channel has been poised for take-off since December. All he is waiting for is authorisation for access to a channel on the telecommunications satellite, Telecom 1, which will provide the vital link in the relaying of STV's programmes to the cable network now being installed in France's main centres.

And still the tour of France's audio-visual horizons does not end here. Another partner, the Brazilian giant Globo Television, is courting STV and has already struck a bargain with the company for the sale of 200 hours of programmes. Globo is the third candidate for the takeover of TMC and seems bound to become one of Berlusconi's main rivals in Europe. It remains to be seen whether the best interests of the French viewer will be served by these international media industrialists, whose aim is to dominate the expanding European market for audio-visual commodities.

It is this overt commercialism accompanying the dawn of the Berlusconi era which France's 'professionnels du spectacle' find so upsetting and which has provoked some almost hysterical reactions. Their main grief concerns the 'cahier des charges', which allows the fifth channel to interrupt its programmes, including films, with commercials. Some film-makers even envisaged bringing a case against 'la

Cinq', on the grounds that tampering with films in this way goes against the legally established *droit d'auteur*. Also, the quota of French films imposed on 'la Cinq' is only 25 per cent for its first five years of operation (it will then jump to 50 per cent), against 50 per cent for France's public channels and 60 per cent for Canal Plus. A similar quota applies to general programming, and during its first five years the channel will consequently be able to dish up a lavish diet of cheap foreign programmes. So easy to despise while he was safely out of range on the other side of the Alps, Berlusconi now strikes the over-protected French film industry as a fearsome monster, a latter-day Hannibal armed with spaghetti varieties and Yankee soaps. In their typically inconsistent fashion, some of the French are now ruing the day they clamoured for independent television, for they prefer the monopoly they know to the unknown.

Meanwhile, Jacques Chirac has vowed to 'smash' the Berlusconi concession, to which he is fiercely opposed. If after 16 March France's right-wing leaders live up to their promises (which has to be contemplated), the liberalisation of French broadcasting will continue apace, and it is likely that one and perhaps two of the public channels will be put up for private purchase. The most obvious buyer is the 'papivore' Robert Hersant, France's one and only press baron, proprietor of *Le Figaro*, *L'Aurore* and *France-Soir* and of a string of provincial papers. Resolutely on the side of the conservatives, Hersant would make a formidable opponent for the Berlusconi-Seydoux tandem.

All in all, Berlusconi's French adventure could turn out to be a more risky business than he bargained for. When the new channel announced its grid of inaugural programmes to the press on 20 January, not one French film figured on the menu, not one significant French star among the list of presenters. 'La Cinq', however, is only constrained to fulfil its 25 per cent annual quota of local films over a three-year period, so Berlusconi will be able to hold out for some time against the boycott without risking his concession. As for the French film industry, will it be prepared to see a valuable source of revenue disappear into the pockets of foreign competitors for more than the purely formal lapse of time required to save appearances?

The key to what happens will surely be the French viewers themselves. If they give a thumbs up sign to Berlusconi's television, the battle could be over by autumn. But if thumbs go down, it is difficult to see how 'la Cinq' could resist the almost certain defection of advertisers, who have so far responded well to the free-for-all conditions extended to them by the new channel. With an initial budget calculated to reach 1.5 billion francs, France's first fully commercial television will have a tough year ahead, if it is to succeed in winning viewers away from the public channels while at the same time fending off its political foes.

*Bouygues is one of the main investors behind the twin-tunnel rail option that was chosen for the Channel Tunnel.

SHERWOOD

JAMES
IVORY

The death of Christopher Isherwood last December brought to an unhappy close a Merchant Ivory project begun more than two years ago. This film, like *Autobiography of a Princess*, was first suggested to us by Anthony Korner, a long-term MP associate, who is now the publisher of *Artforum*. It was to have been constructed somewhat like the already published journal of the month *October*, with its text by Isherwood and portraits by Don Bachardy.

In that attractively produced little book, which was brought out in 1981 by the Twelve Trees Press of Los Angeles, Isherwood's journal entries for October, 1979 cover all sorts of topics serious and, I suppose to some, trivial, such as thoughts on Lord Byron and W. H. Auden and Swami Prabhavananda; on shopping in the supermarket; on his doctor Elsie Giorgi, whom he could imagine ministering to him on his deathbed like a kind of midwife, delivering him out of his body; thoughts on coyotes and other wildlife in the canyon he and Bachardy lived in, and so forth, with accounts of Hollywood dinner parties and who, for instance, said what to whom at David Hockney's. Since this was Isherwood, even the most ephemeral bits seemed to be more than just gossip, and to constitute a partial portrait of the writer as he entered his ninth decade.

October 2 [on his way to the beach to join Bachardy] . . . Running down the street by myself, past neighbors walking or standing outside their houses, I make a conscious effort to run sprightly, lightly. This isn't exactly vanity, at least not of the usual kind—I'm too aware of my baggy old belly and thinning legs for that. No—it's an effort to reassure all who see me that old age isn't necessarily grim and crippling; they needn't dread it. Of course, this is putting them on, in many cases—for some of us there are nasty surprises in store—but it still seems preferable to being a *memento mori* on crutches or in a wheelchair or shuffling along head down and bent double.

I came back from the beach feeling great, but the greatness quickly turned into contented sleepy relaxation. By the time Don was ready to draw me I was starting to yawn. The long vertical plastic slats of his studio window shades soon produce optical illusions. Don appears to be sitting inside a cage of slats—one row immediately behind him, another row between him and me. The effect is dreamlike and powerfully soporific. I droop and drowse . . . Don often describes his work as a confrontation. He himself, with a pen gripped in his mouth ready for use when it is needed instead of a brush, reminds me of a pirate carrying a dagger between his teeth while boarding the enemy. He seems to be attacking the sitter. So now I counterattacked . . .

October 3 [on Byron] . . . I love him as a person even more than I love his *Don Juan*, which is a lot. I would rather spend an evening with him than with any other great writer of the past. I choose the evening because I wouldn't be up to

accompanying him on his daytime gallops through the woods or his long-distance swims; all I could manage would be to sit at his table, watching him and drinking with him . . . I love Byron for being a *serious* playactor. His love affairs and his political heroics, including challenges to duels, have the comic undertones of grand opera. But he means what he says. When it comes to a test, he will take the consequences of his rash words and actions—he is ready to get into a fight, adopt an illegitimate child, emigrate to Venezuela, die for Greece . . . I am amused by his boasting, his vanity, his vulgarity, his struggles with obesity, his dread of old age (by which he meant forty); I am charmed by his reply when accused of having abducted the Countess Guiccioli: "I should like to know who has been carried off—except poor dear me. I have been more ravished myself than anybody since the Trojan War".

October 8 'A warning signal of oncoming senility: Yesterday Don drove down to Laguna Beach to see Jack and Ray. They gave him a grey tee shirt inscribed with the name of the gymnasium they run: Laguna Health Club. I was pleased with the shirt but complained to Don that its manufacturers had printed Laguna Health Club backwards by mistake. Don pointed out that the inscription had read backwards to me because I'd been looking at myself wearing it in the mirror!'

October 31 . . . At the bank this morning, the girls were wearing various items of Halloween costume or makeup. This was, no doubt, because the management had pressured them to do so and supplied what was necessary. But you could see which girls thought it was fun and which girls didn't. The ones who didn't were unconsciously comic. There was one severely businesslike, rather snippy teller who had her face painted as a vampire with bloodlustful lips . . .

Each of these journal entries was accompanied by a portrait in line and brush by Bachardy of someone he and Isherwood were seeing at that time—Joan Didion, Howard Hodgkin, Malcolm McDowell—as well as other friends not especially celebrated of whom they were fond.

We had a plan—as it developed, unthinkable, considering how ill Isherwood became, though he kept it to himself—to move in with a small crew and follow him on his rounds for a month, somewhat keeping to his *I Am a Camera* point of view. He was always active socially, with frequent dining out and going to the kinds of events he and Bachardy enjoyed: amusements like the screening of new films and gallery openings. All that could have been an interesting record to have, all these trips around Los Angeles interspersed with interludes in the house on Adelaide Drive in Santa Monica which he shared with Bachardy; the 'writer at work' would have been the writer as interviewee, while every day a new drawing by his friend, of some other friend, would appear. Sometimes Isherwood himself

would have been the subject of a drawing. (In passing, both men's voices so came to resemble each other that it was difficult at first to know, on the telephone, who was speaking.)

No doubt our plan to record their days, leaving aside Isherwood's illness, would have broken down quite soon. He might have become bored, or might not like having to perform and come up with the perfect *pensée*. Equally, it might have been a gross intrusion to attempt to record the portrait-making process in Bachardy's studio. The confrontation could very well have been between us, and the artist and his nervous sitter. But at least it was a way to get going. Depending on the amount of money we could raise to make the film, there was a possibility of dramatising some of the California episodes, some comic, some more serious, that had taken place in the past and which Isherwood, with his flair for scene-setting and enjoyment of the grotesque, would have relished describing in detail.

How did we, in fact, plan to finance this film? Anthony Korner, acting as co-producer, was endeavouring to raise some of the funds in America, while Ismail Merchant, involved with setting up *A Room with a View*, would do what he could in England. The first to join our project was Britain's Channel 4, which was gratifying. Then the National Endowment for the Humanities approved a script development grant. This was gratifying as well; however, I don't know what sort of script we could have come up with. How do you write scripts for films like this? But they do have their guidelines at the Endowments, and one of the requirements at both the Arts and the Humanities—there seems to be no getting around it, ever, when the subject is Literature—is that you take aboard a number of scholars. These are meant to provide valuable guidance at the script stage to the media people as well as to send signals to the Endowments. In my experience, these academics fall into two categories. The first seem rarely to go to the movies and don't know who the proposal has come from. But they've heard good things about you, so they're relaxed. The second inhabit more rarefied regions of Academia and approach your whole enterprise as if they were turning over something unpleasant on the ground with a stick.

When the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was approached by Korner, they dithered, then turned the film down; PBS in New York, who would have liked to broadcast it, proposed to include it in a series on contemporary writers called 'Modern Masters'. According to someone we know at Channel Thirteen, the Corporation's astonishing reason for turning down the only film about Christopher Isherwood ever to be seriously attempted was that it would have had only a limited appeal to minorities. But even without Public Television funding we perhaps had enough money to shoot the interviews and portrait-making—the real centre of the film. By then, however, it was the

summer of 1985 and Isherwood had taken a turn for the worse. Making *A Room with a View*, we had no idea how ill he was. Isherwood's memories of Forster, and friendship, went back half a century. So it would have been a pleasure for us to be able to screen the completed film for him.

Our own memories of Isherwood go back only to the mid-1970s. We were introduced to him and to Bachardy by Dorothy Maguire and her husband, the late John Swope. While we were shooting *The Wild Party* in Riverside, California, Isherwood and Bachardy came out to visit us on the set. I think they visited sets a lot. When they drove anywhere together then, Isherwood sat or lay in the middle of the back seat, while Bachardy drove. This is because Isherwood did not like Bachardy's driving and it made him less nervous to be in the back seat. It was even better to lie down, because then all you saw out of the windows were the tops of buildings and palm trees. Isherwood said he quite liked doing this, it was both interesting and restful.

Isherwood by Bachardy, August 21 1985.

Usually our memories of Isherwood were happy, but one was agonising. In March 1979 his novel *A Meeting by the River* was produced as a play on Broadway at the Palace Theatre. It had been adapted by Isherwood, working with Bachardy as a collaborator, and was a favourite subject which he had hoped to see filmed, one to which many different actors, in various combinations as the two brothers, and several directors had committed and then withdrawn from over the years. *A Meeting by the River* was well produced on Broadway, with a strong cast headed by Simon Ward and Keith Baxter, supported by Siobhan McKenna and Sam Jaffe, the latter playing the old guru. Lines spoken on the stage that night were of a beauty and character not often encountered in contemporary drama; ideas advanced by the 75-year-old novelist-playwright were of a force and interest rarely found in Broadway's commercial theatre. The people in the audience were not wasting their time. But when those people—myself among them—convened at the Kon Tiki Room in the nearby Americana

Hotel to celebrate (and to wait for the *Times* review, which would be on the news-stands by eleven PM), it was apparent that the play would close, indeed had already done so.

At the centre of the opening night party sat Isherwood, perfectly still, a figure of immense stony dignity, waiting for his guests to make their way up to him, while he stoically bore the burden of his failed play and the strain of the vulgar festivity, with its embraces and cries, all backed up by the thud thud of a DJ's rock music as an antidote to the evening's temple bells, and to get the party moving. Many of the ageing celebrities who attended were so altered in appearance that the photographers and reporters and publicists with their approved lists of guests at the entrance couldn't keep the ancient luminaries straight. Don Bachardy, wearing a radiant smile, sorted them out and led them up to Isherwood. Tennessee Williams was there, in a big white panama hat and dark glasses. He had had his share of these ghastly occasions. I have no idea what he said to Isherwood. Both must have heard there was no advance sale of tickets, so it would have been hard to cheer his old friend up.

After this disappointment—one is reminded somewhat of Henry James' London debacle with his play *Guy Domville*; luckily Isherwood was not booed as James was—he and Bachardy returned to their modest Spanish style, red-tiled and white-stuccoed house in Santa Monica Canyon and to the life recorded in *October*. This house was, Isherwood said, the homeplace to which he had come after so many wanderings. From its terrace through a V-shaped gap in the foothills there was a view of the Pacific, into which, starting 9 October, the sun dipped neatly. They felt romantically about October the ninth and the beginning of the ocean sunsets. They made them more aware that they were living on the last edge of the land and therefore partly belonged to what Isherwood called the Pacific water-world. But sometimes the gales made them feel how exposed they were, between the wind-funnel of their canyon and the roaring ocean.

Isherwood named the place Wuthering Heights West. It was propped up on stilts, like so many houses on the California coast. Any tremor of the earth, of which there were many during their thirty year residence, and it shook alarmingly. Isherwood saw it as an image of his own unstable body, a house not yet sixty years old, but already full of cracks. A real earthquake would have flicked it right off the mountain. His abode, too, seems to express the precariousness of Isherwood's life as a displaced European artist in California, a life during which he might have been seen to be clinging to the underbelly of this country, and, as one of the first homosexual authors to write openly about himself, in the same way the shaking, wind buffeted house might stand for the condition of his Single Man in the American consciousness of the mid-1980s. ■



BFY

British Film Year has sometimes seemed more like British film two years. It was launched at a Cannes press conference in May 1984. Several British journalists who might consider themselves modestly influential only got to hear about this when they were enjoying Rank hospitality a few hundred yards away and began enquiring about the whereabouts of the rest of the British press. As a clash of dates, this was not the best of starts. (A closing event, for which a royal presence is said to have been sought, is planned for Cannes next month.) In the autumn there followed a London press conference—an occasion so ill-starred that some of those involved still pale at the memory. When the microphones were working, which was not all the time, what could mainly be heard was a clash of cross-purposes, on the platform as well as among the press. There were many exhortations for the industry to pull together; and a fairly strong impression that several of those doing the exhorting would not be on speaking terms by the end of the day.

For some months, the BFY organisers struggled to put together an act which looked like being crippled by shortage of cash, or uncertainty about when funds would come through. (The government, criticised for offering only a measly £325,000, at least stumped up on time.) And when BFY finally opened in March 1985, after seeming already to have been with us for months, not all hearts were won by the style of the show—the stuntman diving on Leicester Square and the veteran stars leaving handprints in wet cement.

It says something for the resilience of the organisers that British Film Year survived, went ahead, and at its end would probably be seen by most people as an effort worth making. It may be just luck (though by that time they deserved some) that this was the year of the box-office turnaround, but it would be churlish to deny BFY its share of the credit. They were too strapped for cash to go ahead with the ambitious international programme, designed to sell British goods along with British films, though some overseas events took place. The education programme, I'm told by those who ought to know, was generally seen as a good thing. And the roadshow kept on the road.

There's a touch of the parish magazine about some of BFY's accounts of its exploits. 'Screaming contests at Isabella's disco heralded the coming of another new film to Sheffield . . .' A Swansea grandmother won a lunch with Christopher Cazenove and wept for joy ('I'll have to leave my husband to get his own dinner'). Elsewhere, Leicester came up with a Rambo lookalike competition, Scottish cinema managers told ghost



Fiona Halton, BFY director, visiting the *Room with a View* location.

stories at children's shows, and in Norwich a BBC man rode into town, lightly disguised as Clint Eastwood. Later he was to be flung through a window by a stuntman.

British Film Year has rather favoured this brand of grassroots show business. They were told at the outset that stars wouldn't tour with their pictures. In fact, many did, and when the stars were missing audiences proved quite amenable to a session with a technician. Talks and demonstrations of peripheral crafts, like make-up and costume design, could be guaranteed to bring out audiences of tip-seeking amateurs, some carrying samples of their own work. At the beginning, the BFY people were told by some of the cinema chiefs that they shouldn't talk to managers. In the event, they persuaded managers, who have in recent years tended to become rather a shy and retiring breed, to encounter the public in question and answer sessions. Some managers actually enjoyed it.

Does all this sell tickets, or merely generate a short-term and local goodwill? Who really knows? Fiona Halton, BFY's executive director, won a hard-earned award from the Institute of Sales and Marketing Management, which put a seal of professional approval on the campaign. 'A cross between Margaret Thatcher and Mary Poppins,' says her colleague Keith Howes. Fiona Halton smiles with the slightly glazed look of one who has heard that compliment, or crack, more than once. But everyone, both in and out of the business, seems to have heard of British Film Year, an achievement in itself calling for indefatigable energy and a kind of Poppinian innocence about daring the obvious. The film industry is innately suspicious; it responds to a suggestion of amateurism because it looks less threatening.

The BFY people reckon that one of their successes has been to stimulate the setting up of local committees, bringing together cinema managers, film societies, local press and radio, town councillors and the like. Presumably some of these committees will survive the year and some won't. At the least, the exhibition end of the business has been encouraged to bestir itself, and not before time. The BFY organisers found managers who had so far forgotten their show business connections that they didn't know what to do when a star appeared on the premises. Nearer home, Keith Howes reports calling in quite recently at a West End cinema, intending to book a seat for the last show and return after a meal. This, however, was more than could be done. The manager was in the pub, there was no one authorised to take bookings, come back later. In another instance, the distributors of a new and successful British film, which had better go unnamed, proved unable to supply posters, soundtrack record or even stills when these were requested for promotional purposes. British Film Year has tried to persuade this often dejected industry to help itself; it can't have done any harm.

35 per cent?

There seems to be a general, if rather vague, impression that British cinema audiences increased by some 35 per cent during the last year. But did they? There was an increase of about 35 per cent for the five months January-May 1985 by comparison with the same period in 1984. That's if you take the Department of Trade and Industry figures. On the other hand, you might prefer the

Marplan figures, which show an increase of some 28 per cent over the same five months. May is significant because at that point the DFTI dropped out of the game, since it was no longer required to collect the attendance figures for Eady purposes. Taking the year as a whole, the Marplan figures show an increase of about 20 per cent.

Here, however, things become a little confused, as tends to be the way with most film industry statistics. The significance of the percentages, of course, rather depends on where you start from. The DFTI's estimated total for the 1984 attendance figures was 53 million, later revised down to 51 million. Marplan's 1984 total was a much heftier 58.4 million. The discrepancy, according to *Screen International*, has to do not only with somewhat different reporting methods but with the fact that the Marplan statistics take in Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, whereas the DFTI confined itself to mainland Britain. Which might suggest that in Northern Ireland, not to speak of the Channel Islands, filmgoing must be doing rather well.

In any event, and whatever the exact percentages, there's no doubt that the 1985 figures gave the exhibition side of the industry its first glimmer of hope in many a long year. Particularly so when you remember British Film Year's slightly pathetic original target of 4 per cent, at a time when audiences were slipping away so fast that the obvious question ('four per cent of what?') was the one nobody had the heart to ask. Audience figures for 1985 improved on the same months in 1984 in eight months out of the twelve, sometimes by as much as 50 or 60 per cent. In May (Marplan and the DFTI in agreement, though with different percentages) and in June, November and December (Marplan) attendances actually dropped below 1984 levels, showing the precarious nature of the whole business. But Cinema and Video Audience Research (choicely acronymed as CAVIAR) estimate that the audience which attends the cinema once a month or more went up among 7 to 14-year-olds from 570,000 to 910,000, and among 15 to 19-year-olds from 790,000 to 1,340,000.

In a year bracketed between *Ghostbusters* and *Back to the Future*, CAVIAR's statistics might back the view that British cinema managers ought to be giving all their thanks to Steven Spielberg and a few of his colleagues. Or there's the notion, given some support by evidence too casual to be called research, that the older and more occasional film-goer has read a lot about new British films, all the way from *The Shooting Party* to *Letter to Brezhnev*, and concluded they might merit a visit. Or there's British Film Year and the £6 million of free publicity it is estimated to have generated for the business. Or the



The Mayor of Casterbridge (1921).

cutting of cinema seat prices in some areas. Or the current falling off in TV viewing figures, allied to a general, perceptible boredom with television. Or, if all else fails, fall back on the weather, which can be trusted to explain anything you might want it to.

Whatever the underlying reasons for 1985, the real question is whether it turns out to be a freak year, a period of remission in an incurable illness, or whether the cinema audience is actually beginning to creep back and we could be seeing the start of another shift in social patterns. (To keep it in perspective, the 1985 figures were still well behind those for as recent a year as 1981, which at the time looked like the end of the cinema world.) All cinema managers must hope 1985 was not just an oddity; one doubts if any would bet the mortgage on it, or even the takings from *Ghostbusters*.

L'Ecole de Shoreham

Everyone knows about the Brighton School. I remember that the first time I met René Clair he managed exquisitely to imply—he was too courteous to state—that for British films it had been downhill all the way since *L'Ecole de Brighton*, which he admired extravagantly. I hadn't realised, however, that just a few miles along the coast, at Shoreham, there was also a vigorous film-making enterprise, getting under way later than Brighton but keeping going until the early 1920s. Shoreham boasted a greenhouse type studio, entirely dependent for some years on natural light, on which construction began in 1915. A prospectus of the 20s

claimed: 'As the studio is situated on a spot at least fifty miles from any real smoke, a pure and clean light may be obtained, probably unrivalled by any other place in England... Undoubtedly the Los Angeles of English production.'

The quotation and the information come from *Bungalow Town*, an appealing, enthusiastically amateur booklet written and published by Neb Wolters (14 Mill Hill Drive, Shoreham-by-Sea, £1.95). The bungalows, which Mr Wolters will not hear described as a shanty town, preceded the film-making. Most of the early ones were put up by music hall people: Marie Loftus, who got there first, at 'Cecilia', Will Evans at 'Hop o' My Thumb', the Lupinos at 'Arnside', Prince Littler at 'Mitford', Hetty King at 'The Bungalow'. The basic bungalow was often an old railway carriage, towed into place on a concrete foundation by a team of horses; the residents, though doing without gas, electricity and even piped water, managed some startlingly grand and heavily furnished interiors.

A company called Sunny South filmed at Shoreham's Old Fort before the studio was built. To recruit extras, the producer, the set designer F. L. Lyndhurst, put a notice on the front gate of 'Lyndora': 'People wanting to appear in a film will be allowed to do so free of charge if they present themselves at the Old Fort at 10 o'clock.' People did indeed turn up. Around 1910, someone remembers watching them doing the Retreat from Moscow—perhaps a straight version by George Albert Smith, though Napoleon did fall off his horse, or possibly a 'Pimple' parody. Then came the studio, occupied at first by Lyndhurst's company, now named Sealight, and later by a Manchester-based company called Progress Films. Apart from a more or

less resident stock company, actors included Sybil Thorndike, Gladys Cooper (who lived for a while at Shoreham, though not in a bungalow) and even the Vitagraph Girl, Florence Turner, who promptly caught pneumonia after filming in the studio's unheated tank.

Just after the war, in 1919, they filmed *Little Dorrit*, with some splendidly solid sets; also *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Thomas Hardy came to visit and toured the studio in a wheelchair, though Mr Wolters doesn't record what he made of it) and a racing melodrama, *Rogues of the Turf*, for which the camera crew found themselves out at sea on a drifting barge with a maddened horse. A fire in the winter of 1922-23 did for many of the bungalows, though the studio survived with a few scratches. Stanley Mumford, the resident cameraman, first dragged the movie negatives to safety from under his bed, which was where they happened to be stored, and then put the camera on its tripod to film the fire. Those, indeed, were the days.

Brooks

Two legends on display in an hour of BBC viewing. First, Louise Brooks, interviewed for *Arena* by a rather moonstruck Richard Leacock some long while before her death last year, fragile but laughing, still insisting that in her acting days she had never really known what she was doing. Then on *Film 86* Bette Davis, who has always known what she was doing, now looking all her years but still defining happiness as a good script. Brooks certainly made too few films; Davis arguably has made too many—or found too many bad scripts. Brooks made off to Europe and Hollywood took her back only on sufferance; with longer hair, a Samson in reverse, she's eclipsed in a quickie Western by the young John Wayne. Davis stayed, fought the studios, preferred the Europe they manufactured on the Warner lot. Both dazzling; both tough as old boots.

Later, I turn up an old letter from Louise Brooks, as quotable as her published writing. 'I wonder why no one has written about Clara Bow. Her life was really as terrible and tragic as actresses such as Joan Crawford love to imagine theirs... Then to become the biggest box-office star in Hollywood, at the same time there was no one too low, too vulgar not to feel superior to her. No one came near her grand house with her oil portrait in the dining room and service for twelve. More and more I see that the pursuit of "culture" and "society" has ruined more actresses than bad parts.' And, in the same letter, 'Thinking they are perfectly concealed by the medium, people give themselves away totally during the comparatively long time of picture production.'

Edinburgh to Kirkcaldy

Back with the cinema audience, the annual statistics of the regional cinemas supported by the British Film Institute yield some interesting reading. There are 33 theatres reporting, and between them in 1985 they clocked up a record, with attendance figures edging their way very close to a million: 975,339 tickets sold, to be precise, all the way from 145,405 in Edinburgh to 4,610 in Kirkcaldy. Overall, these cinemas increased their audience by 12.5 per cent—quite a way below the national average, but with the significant difference that this is not part of some wild seesaw but a further stage in a steady advance, which has seen attendances up by 38 per cent over the last three years. The Metro, a little 128-seater in Derby, holds the 1985 record, a startling 75 per cent increase. In five places, equally surprisingly, attendance figures went clean against the general trend and actually fell away during the year—by 28 per cent in Belfast, and lesser percentages at Bristol's Arnolfini cinema and in Coventry, Stoke and Kirkcaldy. No pattern discernible there, unless there are local factors at work. At the other end, the front-runners, after Derby, were Bradford, Cardiff, Leeds, Scunthorpe and Dartington, which has ceded the wooden spoon, as the theatre with the fewest admissions, to Kirkcaldy.

The BFI booked more than 4,000 programmes to the theatres during the year. It reckons that one reason more people are going to the cinemas is simply that there are more films there for them to go to. Nottingham (31 per cent up) had 55 per cent more films; record-breaking Derby 23 per cent more, and so on. Which films did best? The difference in size of cinemas and number of performances makes comparisons not just unfair but virtually meaningless. For the record, however, *Santa Claus the*

Louise Brooks in *Beggars of Life*.



Movie clocked up the highest score: 8,160 admissions in Sheffield, spread over 24 performances. The runners up: *Rosi's Carmen* (6,581 in Edinburgh; 21 performances), Jonathan Demme's pop concert film *Stop Making Sense* (6,511 in Glasgow; 11 performances), followed by *Cal* at Edinburgh and *Subway* at Bristol.

A rough and ready way of scoring popularity is to take the films which figure in the top three scorers for the cinemas, regardless of size or number of shows. By which reckoning you get: *Amadeus* (a top three runner in 9 cinemas), *Stop Making Sense* (8), *The Shooting Party* (7), *Paris, Texas* and *Carmen* (6), *Subway* and *A Private Function* (5), *Repo Man* and *Cal* (4). This would seem, not surprisingly, to cover most, if not all, tastes, with three British films holding their corner.

Wild words

There's a strange review in the February issue of *Stills* of *The Cinema Book*, edited by Pam Cook and published by the British Film Institute. 'An atrocious enterprise,' says the writer, Peter Richards, in his first sentence. He is merely limbering up. 'Smug, self-important, profoundly philistine, even inhuman trash' comes at the end of the first paragraph; 'loathsome, anti-intellectual, life-hating, grubby, bogus' at the end of the third. It will be gathered that Mr Richards doesn't think a great deal of film theory, or theorists, and the worse for them if they should chance to be foreign. Barthes, Metz, Althusser are summarily seen off: 'Characters one had hoped were simply funny foreigner caricatures from the cast list of some as yet unmade sequel to *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*.' And so on, through nine paragraphs of affront and outrage, which actually have very little to say about the book he has been engaged to review.

Mr Richards, who has borne the proud title of Film Buff of the Year, courtesy of the BBC, crossed swords with this column when he got extremely cross with Heurtebise ('appalled', 'nauseated', 'this nameless fool') about such matters as whether films were better seen in cinemas or on video. His opinions are, of course, his own affair, as he mourns the plight of those 'genuine enthusiasts who are driven away weeping, with only the memory of great art to sustain them,' by the terrible advance of film theory. Why, however, should *Stills* editor James Saynor and films editor Graham Fuller choose to give house-room to quite so intemperate an expression of prejudice? One hopes 'the magazine of the film and television industry' isn't taking the view that to blast all and any film theory up hill and down dale is one way of pleasing the punters.

KOCKENLOCKER

NAILS THAT STICK OUT

A New Independent Cinema in Japan

TONY RAYNS

The problem with western approaches to Japan has long been our sense of the country's otherness. Japan is inexhaustibly exotic, Japan is forever in some fundamental way *different*. This stereotype, lovingly endorsed by the Japanese themselves, has impeded film studies as much as any other area of enquiry. The perception of 'classic' Japanese cinema as exotic led to endless misunderstandings and dubious valuations, and the perception of most modern Japanese cinema as non-exotic has led many to overlook it entirely. Western critics of every political colour are still in mourning for the death of the film industry that somehow miraculously triumphed over 'commercialism' to produce masterpieces of exquisite artistry and refinement; those on the left tend to lament the disappearance of formal strategies that were specifically Japanese, while those on the right seem to see Ozu's death as marking the end of Japanese cinema *tout court*, barring late Kurosawa and the odd backward-looking art movie. None of this is exactly conducive to an understanding of the present-day situation in Japanese cinema, and it has doubtless played its part in securing the virtual disappearance of new Japanese films from western screens.

The hard fact is that latter-day developments in Japanese film-making have almost exactly paralleled developments in the West. The similarities, particularly at the institutional level, are a great deal more striking than the differences. The old studio system broke down in the 1960s, as the major companies faced declining audiences on the one hand and absconding contract staff

on the other. The majors have since lurched from one crisis to another, like the contemporaries of United Artists, Rank and Gaumont that they are: barely fending off bankruptcy, finding box-office certainties ever more elusive, falling hopelessly out of touch with prospective audiences and failing to meet competition from new, tougher-minded operators like the publisher Kadokawa Haruki. Recent mega-hits like Kurahara Koreyoshi's *Nankyoku Monogatari* (*Antarctica*, a canine remake of *Chariots of Fire*) and Ichikawa Kon's new version of *Biruma no Tategoto* (*The Burmese Harp*) thus enjoy the same place in the Japanese market that *Indiana Jones* and *Ghostbusters* have in the American market. Now television companies are beginning to invest in film production, albeit very selectively. And while the film industry struggles to rethink its policies, an enormous and diverse independent sector has come into being—again paralleling the spread and range of independent cinema in the West.

Thanks to Oshima and a few of his fellow-refugees from the majors, the independent films that have achieved the highest profile outside Japan have been low-budget art movies, most of them produced or co-produced by the Art Theatre Guild (ATG), which has its own small circuit of cinemas. However, there has also been a wealth of political film-making (not only the ecological documentaries seen abroad, but also—to give only one example—films like Yamatani Tetsuo's studies of Japan's shameful colonial heritage in South-East Asia) and there is a hard core of avant-garde film-makers clustered

around Image Forum, an organisation modelled on the West's film co-ops.

Most interesting of all, the last decade has seen an explosion in yet another area of independent cinema: 16mm and Super-8 film-making, often at feature length, by young directors who are neither part of the formalist avant-garde nor yet ready to subscribe to the conventions of mainstream art cinema. Much of this work originated in college film-groups in the late 1970s, but plenty of the directors have proved sufficiently committed to continue along a non-commercial path after graduating. There is no Japan Arts Council to subsidise them, and they get no noticeable support from the public sector, but they have found their 'angel' in the Tokyo listings magazine PIA, which mounts an annual festival of their films and increasingly involves itself in alternative distribution. These directors, too, have their western equivalents (Steve Dowskin, Straub/Huillet and Mick Eaton come to mind), but there are enough of them in Japan to constitute a significant movement. At its best—in the films of Yamakawa Naoto and Nagasaki Shunichi—this movement seems to me to be producing work of the highest international standard.

But how Japanese is it? To say that Japanese cinema has been through the same financial, structural and aesthetic upheavals as American, British and French cinema is not, of course, to deny the cultural specifics that make a Japanese film Japanese. But identifying cultural specificity is not as easy nowadays as it was in the days when Mizoguchi, for instance, unfolded elaborate sequence-shots with the

detached precision of a painter of *emakimono* picture-scrolls. Whatever currents may run deeper, the surface of Japanese life has changed beyond recognition in the years since the war, and directors of the new generation lead lives in many ways identical with those of their western contemporaries. Although their film viewing has been limited by the vagaries of distribution, they have been exposed to (and influenced by) a much wider range of non-Japanese cinema than any previous generation, and one result is that their films have no formal characteristics that would not be equally viable in a western film. Furthermore, judging by their choices of subject and angles of approach, they share the preoccupations and hang-ups of most western independents: sexual problems, anarchic violence, political contradictions, questioning of middle-class norms, distrust of documentary 'truth', you name it. Exotic, in other words, these films are not.

At least one thing has changed very little in postwar Japanese society: the degree of social conformity that the nation expects from (imposes on) its citizens. This is not simply a matter of observing the explicit conventions that govern public and private behaviour, language and so on, but a much more deep-rooted denial of individuality at all levels. 'Nails that stick out must be hammered in' is a Japanese proverb as current now as it was a century ago. Japanese are educated from their earliest years to accept their place in a rigid social hierarchy, to find their identity in groups rather than as individuals, and to follow consensus thought in all matters.* This hyper-conformism is little understood by most western observers, although it takes no more than a glance at a Japanese tour group abroad to see the principle in action. Any attempt to grasp the cultural specificity of the new Japanese independents must start from the perception that these are 'nails that stick out': non-conformist films made by individuals who have so far managed to resist the Japanese consensus. Independents are, of course, marginalised all over the world; the difference here is that the very notion of independent initiative and action seems profoundly un-Japanese.

This is not to say that none of the new directors will move into areas of the commercial industry. Some already have, and others certainly will. Nor is it to say that young and unfunded filmmakers have a monopoly on independent points of view in Japan. But the filmmakers in question belong to a generation that has passed through the usual phase of adolescent rebellion and emerged still not wanting to accept its place as a cog in the machine; perhaps for the first time in modern Japanese history, there is a sizeable minority of people who openly reject the consensus.

*Readers interested in exploring this phenomenon in more detail are warmly recommended to Ian Buruma's book *A Japanese Mirror: Heroes and Villains of Japanese Culture* (Penguin).

This will hardly shake the foundations of Japanese capitalism, but it is making for some interesting films.

It is hard to know how best to broach them. It would be quite possible to prepare a grid of 'issues' (political, social, psychological and aesthetic) and lay it across a representative sampling of films to show how particular concerns assert themselves time and again, albeit with different inflections. However, this would imply that the independents form a more homogeneous group than, in fact, they do. Given that most of these directors are at the start of their careers,

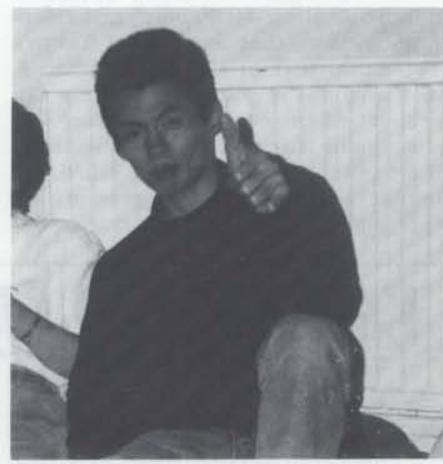
and that their films are as yet scarcely known outside Japan, I have preferred to sketch seven of them as individuals. The selection is necessarily somewhat arbitrary (limited by what I've been able to see), but it includes most of the directors considered important in Japanese film circles. All these film-makers have already had one or two screenings outside Japan, notably in Berlin, Edinburgh, Hong Kong and Paris. My chief regret about the selection is that it includes no women directors; there are several women independents, and their day will come.

ISHII Sogo

ISHII (born 1957) scarcely belongs in present company any more, since he has already made four 35mm features and has a busy parallel career in rock videos and commercials; he might be Japan's answer to Julien Temple. But he fits none the less, partly because he maintains an admirably iconoclastic point of view wherever he works, partly because he demonstrates that independence need not be a ghetto.

Ishii formed a film group at Nihon University and started working on Super-8; he got his professional launch while he was still a student, when the faded major Nikkatsu invited him to remake his first Super-8 feature in 35mm. Since graduating, he has made three more features (the last two for the major Toei and for ATG respectively) and numerous shorts.

His features *Kuruizaki Thunder Road* (*Crazy Thunder Road*, 1980) and *Bakuretsu Toshi* (*Burst City*, 1981) are both chaotic punk fantasies, the first about a tribal war between a gang of rocker-bikers and a squad of far-right terrorists, the second about the hordes of feuding riffraff who inhabit a devastated city of the future. Neither has any filmic qualities to speak of (unless one counts



Ishii Sogo.

boundless energy), but they are worth noting here for two reasons. First, they served as a rallying point for other independent film-makers, encouraging many from their casts and crews to go on to films of their own. Second, they clearly defined the chasm that divides Ishii's generation from the Oshima generation. Social misfits and extremists of various sorts have preoccupied Japan's dissident intellectuals since the mid-1950s, and Oshima, in particular, built a

Burst City, 1981.



long stretch of his career on his empathy with juvenile delinquents and other criminals. Ishii's early features pick up this preoccupation, but without a shred of the former social and moral rationales: left and right come in for equal amounts of stick, there are no heroes or winners, violence is constant and undifferentiated, and sexuality is perverse, polymorphous and conspicuously unerotic.

Ishii has gone on to make the altogether more accomplished *Gyakufunsha Kazoku* (*The Crazy Family*, 1984), noted in SIGHT AND SOUND's report from the 1985 Berlin Festival. It finds him engaging for the first time with the stereotypes of mainstream Japanese society, and the Japanese title provides a convenient measure of its subversive thrust. *Gyakufunsha Kazoku* translates literally as 'Back-Jet Family', and refers to an incident that occurred at Tokyo's Haneda Airport in the early 1980s. A pilot was on the point of landing a JAL airliner when he fired the back-jet, causing the aircraft to crash instantly. Many of the passengers were killed. An inquest determined that pressure of work had caused the pilot to crack.



The Crazy Family, 1984.

YAMAMOTO Masashi

YAMAMOTO (born 1956) is temperamentally close to Ishii, although he seems far less likely to be embraced by ATG or any of the majors. He, too, started out on Super-8, and attracted attention with a 1980 film called *Saint Terrorism*. The only one of his films that I've seen is his 16mm feature *Yami no Carnival* (*Dark Carnival*, 1981), which offers a grisly metaphorical journey through the Shinjuku night. Its protagonist is a young woman, Kumi (played by Ota Kumiko), first seen as vocalist with a Velvet Underground-ish rock band; she abandons her husband and child and sets off on a night-long voyage of discovery, encountering a cross-

section of Tokyo's lowlife as she goes. Much of what she stumbles on is cruel or violent: a terrorist searching for the optimum spot to plant a bomb, a rent-boy strangled in a park by his middle-aged client, a demented girl who traps and sells crows. She herself is attacked at one point and experiences (or imagines) a miscarriage. The morning sees her reunited with husband and child outside the Kinokuniya bookshop, as if nothing had happened.

Deliberately ugly and unseductive, *Dark Carnival* is disturbingly compulsive because so much of it is manifestly rooted in a certain truth. The actors are non-professionals, essentially playing

themselves. Most of the dramatic situations are initially plausible, and the rough and ready location filming lends them even greater credibility. But the film becomes truly remarkable only in its completely unheralded escalations into fantasy. After the murder of the boy prostitute, for instance, the camera pulls back from his exposed buttocks to show three other rent-boys clustering round to see what has happened. Their banter is callous, and they strip the corpse of all its marketable possessions. Then, suddenly, fantasy takes over: the boys give their dead colleague a strangely ritualised funeral by the light of fireworks conjured from nowhere. The scene amounts to an oasis of sentimentality in a desert of misanthropy. Cultural specificity? I don't know, but I can't imagine the scene transplanted to a British or American independent.

SANO (born 1956) is a comparative newcomer as a director (he has just completed his second Super-8 feature), although he has also acted in several independent films, including Ishii's *Crazy Thunder Road* and Matsui Yoshihiko's repellent, homophobic *Sabita Kankara* (*Rusty Can*, 1981). His first feature was *Mimizu no Uta* (*The Worm Sings*, 1982). Its protagonist, played by Sano himself, could easily be a character from *Dark Carnival*; he is a man who lives by snatching bags but otherwise endeavours to cut himself off from all human contacts. He is naturally frustrated at every turn: deafened by noise from the next-door apartment, raped by a vagrant in a public toilet, picked on by small-time gangsters. He happens on a gun, and goes out to blow these incursions on his solitude away. But what he cannot blow away is his

SANO Kazuhiko



The Worm Sings, 1982.

own creative unconscious, imagined with astonishing literalness as the phantom figure of a pregnant man who appears in his dreams to taunt him.

Aside from its narrative skill—an exemplary demonstration of what can be achieved these days on Super-8—the film is interesting for its cross-breeding of Japanese and American ideas. There are several references to the prison writings of the convicted murderer

Nagayama Norio, reverberating eerily with the scene of a man's murder in a bathroom that consciously evokes the Manson murders. One's general sense that the spirit of Travis Bickle inhabits the film is confirmed by a scene in which Sano acts out the very threat uttered by Scorsese in his *Taxi Driver* cameo. As a lexicon of pathological traits, then, the film is fairly comprehensive. As a contribution to Japanese independent

cinema, it stands as far from Imamura's analysis of a similar figure in *Vengeance Is Mine* as Ishii's punks do from Oshima's delinquents. Sano projects his own frustration into a misanthropic fantasy and thrusts it at the audience as a visceral assault. The result would be negligible if it weren't for the aesthetic control and the leavening of rationality ironically supplied by the dream sequences.

YAZAKI Hitoshi

YAZAKI (born 1956) is another Nihon University graduate who began making Super-8 films in a college group. He is a contemporary and friend of Nagasaki Shunichi, and has worked on two of his films as an assistant. His only feature to date is the 16mm *Kazetachi no Gogo* (*Afternoon Breezes*, 1980); the titles of two earlier Super-8 films (which I haven't seen) translate intriguingly as *Rear Window* and *Winter Light*.

Afternoon Breezes is completely *sui generis*, a low-key, undramatic movie that distantly observes a young woman's growing lesbian crush on her roommate. It mercifully has no truck with 'love', but pursues 'obsession' with a tenacity and insight worthy of Buñuel himself. It is constructed predominantly in long shots, often high-angled, and many of its scenes are shot in single, continuous takes. At a narrative level, it confines itself to the most everyday material possible: the characters are seen at home, at work, on public transport, in coffee-shops and on streets. To make the film's address to its audience even less aggressive, Yazaki likes to have the sound played at a barely audible level, so that the dialogue yields only a few important facts and elsewhere registers as a background hum. For fully thirty minutes, this approach comes across as a leisurely and extremely unassertive form of realism. Then it dawns that, far from being objective, the film is offering a highly sympathetic subjective account of the obsessed girl's feelings, imaginings and anxieties.

There are two obvious levels at which *Afternoon Breezes* challenges a Japanese audience. First, by breaking the con-

spiracy of silence and openly discussing a lesbian infatuation. (Yazaki, who tries to be present whenever the film is



Yazaki Hitoshi.

screened, reports that some audiences have reacted with outright shock, despite the fact that there isn't an exploitative frame in the film.) Second, by imposing its own kind of dramatic minimalism, implicitly challenging to an audience raised on mainstream cinema and tv. But there is a third level at which the film is potentially most challenging. By not making the film's subjectivity explicit at the outset, Yazaki subtly catches his audiences unawares, eventually defying them not to identify with a figure who cannot (because of the 'realist' support) be dismissed as a fantasy projection. Audiences used to open discussion of homosexuality might well react differently, as they might to the male gay elements in some of the other films mentioned here.

Afternoon Breezes, 1980.



RIJU Go

RIJU (born 1962) works mainly as an actor, mostly on tv but he also recently played Mishima as a teenager in Paul Schrader's film. He began making Super-8 films at high school and one of them, *Kyokun 1* (*Moral Lesson 1*, 1980), caught Oshima's attention. He later dropped out of Seikei University to concentrate on film-making and acting. His latest film, *Mienai* (*Blind Alley*, 1985), was noted in SIGHT AND SOUND's report from Edinburgh last year.

Blind Alley was made on 3/4-inch videotape and transferred to 16mm film for distribution. It has already attracted some attention in the West as a very skilful fake documentary in the vein of David Holzman's *Diary* (although Riju, of course, was still in short pants when that was made). The pastiche is, indeed, skilful, but that should deafen no one to the issues the film raises. The clash between Riju-as-film-maker and

Riju Go.



the truck-driver-as-subject, no matter how satirically Riju-as-director/writer frames it, directly confronts the particular alienation felt by Riju's generation in Japan: the loss of faith in political activism, the sense of directionlessness, the wilful refusal to engage with 'external' questions, the continuing problem of the pressure on young people to pass exams. In other words, the film broaches questions of immediate relevance to its intended audience, and has the wit to ask itself questions about the way it constructs meaning in the process. A film like *Blind Alley* is specifically Japanese in terms of the characters it invents and the language they speak, but it is obvious that it could be remade in more or less similar terms in any developed country. What's interesting is that nothing like it is being made anywhere else.

Blind Alley, 1985.



NAGASAKI Shunichi

NAGASAKI (born 1956) is yet another graduate of the film course at Nihon University. He began making Super-8 films as a student and has worked as an independent director since graduating. Exceptionally, he is equally ready to work in Super-8, 16mm or 35mm or on video. He made his first 35mm feature (for ATG) in 1982, and has since worked mostly in Super-8.

The earliest of Nagasaki's films that I've seen is the 16mm feature *Yuki ga Rock O Suteta Natsu* (*The Summer Yuki Gave Up Rock Music*, 1978), which is set in mid-winter and in which Yuki never sang 'rock' in the first place. These prove to be the least of the mysteries in a film so crammed with narrative displacements that one can never be quite sure what is 'text' and what is 'subtext'. At heart, *Yuki* is an adolescent dream of violent action, a film in which the solution to every problem is extreme.

Heart, Beating in the Dark, 1982.



Nagasaki Shunichi.

Yuki, it transpires, is a coffee-shop chanteuse who aspires to a new career but actually starts working as an expensive call-girl. The film hinges on the efforts of her former manager Toshi to get her back to work. Matters are complicated by Yuki's new manager Hirooka, a one-time member of Toshi's own band, and by the strange menage

around Toshi, which includes a gay transvestite called Max and a heterosexual couple who are having difficulties in their relationship. These characters, it becomes clear, are designed specifically to strike sparks off each other, and their individual roles are less important than the collective mismatch. Each desires something or someone that he or she cannot have—'as if they're looking for summer in the middle of winter.' No one could claim this as a mature or fully developed film, but it was certainly an indication that Nagasaki's talent was out of the ordinary.

I have not yet seen Nagasaki's ATG feature, but the Super-8 feature he made after it strikes me as a masterpiece. *Yamiutsu Shinzo* (*Heart, Beating in the Dark*, 1982) has what must be the simplest narrative line in all Nagasaki's work: a young couple, apparently on the run from something, beg a room for the night from an old college friend of the boy. Left alone, they make love, the boy showing almost sadistic brutality to the girl. The boy succumbs to food poisoning and spends a sleepless night. Next morning, they go on their way. This simple fiction is broken up by three other types of material. First, flashbacks to the couple's past. These are acted out in the room, but with the boy playing the girl and vice versa. Second, a long monologue delivered direct to camera by the boy, in which he describes how they had an unwanted baby and eventually killed it. Third, two segments from an interview with a social worker in which he discusses the burgeoning problem of unwanted pregnancies and infanticide.

Like my synopsis, the film withholds the precise nature of the couple's guilty secret until near the end. The audience is thus left for nearly an hour to speculate on the connection between the social worker and the couple, the meaning of the switched-sex flashbacks and what it is that binds the couple together in a near-sado-masochist relationship. And Nagasaki provides plenty to speculate on. The social worker bumbles, and seems hopelessly ineffectual; in any



case, his special field is handicapped children, and that has no apparent relevance to the couple. The flashbacks are especially remarkable, both in the writing and in the performances of Muroi Shigeru and Naito Takeshi: two minutes of Ms Muroi (as the boy) describing how he used to pick up girls explodes more sex-pol bombs than most feminist tracts even know exist. When it comes, the monologue is as stark and shocking as it has to be, and its effect is curiously cathartic.

These collisions and conjunctions are half absurdist and half formalist, and they keep the film continuously suspended between fiction, meta-fiction and documentary. Good modernist avant-garde practice, of course, but the film no more registers as a box of fashionable tricks than it allows itself to be reduced to direct questions or easy formulations. Sheerly as drama, *Heart, Beating in the Dark* is at least as potent as *Gun Crazy* or *Detour*. And it's at the level of dramatic fiction that it is ultimately most provocative and disturbing, because the final scene—the couple leaving the room that has literally given their story its formal parameters—unmistakably resolves the film as a love story. As such, it's as terrifying and chastening as anything of Oshima's.

Nagasaki's most recent work is less ambitious in scope, but it confirms him as a brilliantly adventurous and innovative talent. He made the short film *London Calling* during a visit to the 1984 London Film Festival; it starts out as an autobiographical account of his first visit to the city, turns into a strangely oblique fiction about a search for a missing woman and then resolves itself into a meditation on what exactly it is that we remember about people and



Scenario: Betrayed by Yamaguchi Momoe, 1985.

places—all within the space of fifteen minutes. One wonders how many other film-makers could or would have undertaken such an original impromptu—Chris Marker? Jon Jost?

Nagasaki's latest film is a Super-8 sketch for a film that may or may not get made in the future. It's called *Scenario: Yamaguchi Momoe no Haishin* (*Scenario: Betrayed by Yamaguchi Momoe, 1985*)—the echo of Manuel Puig is intended—and its starting point is the retirement of the young singer Yamaguchi Momoe, an event that was taken by many Japanese as a national tragedy. Nagasaki imagines a retired singer working as nursemaid to a catatonic girl from a rich family; she is

sought out by a former admirer, and his arrival explodes the ménage into chaos. The film is divided into four chapters, each of which begins with a staged and scripted sequence (using romantic dialogue from famous Hollywood melodramas of the 1930s) and then shifts into directed improvisations with the same actors, frequently interrupted by Nagasaki's off-screen voice. Although avowedly no more than a sketch, the film clearly picks up where *Heart* left off: it takes apart the concepts of melodrama and stardom while pursuing its own line of enquiry into sexual violence and cruelty. Still now, it seems to me extraordinary to find this level of invention in an unsung Super-8 film from Japan.

YAMAKAWA Naoto



Yamakawa Naoto.

YAMAKAWA (born 1957) read psychology at Waseda University and was inspired to take up film-making (initially on Super-8) by seeing the films of Godard and Yoshida Yoshishige. He has worked as an independent director since 1980, and is currently making his first 35mm feature.

His 16mm feature *Another Side* (1980), drawn from a novel by Aoki Yoshiteru, reaches parts that no other film about students has reached, before or since. Its approach seems at first sight

as scattershot as early Godard, but the structure turns out to be as exact as trigonometry. Its four central characters (three boys and a girl who is their intellectual superior) are variously involved in an avant-garde theatre group and in the university rugby team. The film takes its time exploring their conversations, their drama workshops, their rugby practices and matches, their friendship with the owner of a local pool-hall and their impulsive trip to Tsugaru, birthplace of the novelist Dazai Osamu. In the background is the Ikeda government's plan for Japan's 'economic miracle'. The underlying theme is revealed gradually, as the debates and discussions coalesce around two issues: teamwork as concerted social action versus teamwork as ignominious social conformity, and individuality as fulfilment versus individuality as loneliness. The issues come to a head over the apparent suicide of one of the boys, an event which leaves the others groping to make sense of his motivation—and of their own.

Yamakawa's achievement in *Another Side* is to take generally familiar material about student life and to fictionalise it in the fullest sense. That is, to pull it into patterns that allow him to scrutinise it from several different perspectives at once. The result is anything but banal and everyday; the most casual and offhand moments become privileged bearers of larger meanings as they take their place in the film's complex scheme of things. There are two stunning sequences that work by superimposing one perspective on top of another. In one, the three surviving members of the group stand on the railway track where the boy died; suddenly both their words and Yamakawa's visual composition duplicate a theatre-sequence seen at the start of the film, generating an incandescent moment of synthesis.

In the other, we see an imagined reconstruction of the boy's suicide and hear his voice explaining why he took up rugby: 'When you get possession of the ball, you cling to it as if your whole life depended on it and concentrate on moving forward. Then, when you're tackled, you readily give it up to a teammate, who has the same goal. A ball that



Another Side, 1980.

can never be thrown forward, hence a game in which you must move forward yourself, using your own body as a shield. It was in that arena that I discovered the real meaning of co-existence... Yamakawa shows us the boy pounding along the railway track at night, caught in the light from an oncoming train; he is carrying a whisky bottle and at the crucial moment throws it to the side of the track, as if he were passing back a rugby ball. At this point, the film reaches a hallucinatory level of conceptual expressionism, with one action read in terms of another and both having meanings and implications that suddenly mesh in the mind.

The two films that Yamakawa has completed since *Another Side* are both 16mm shorts, and it comes as no surprise that both are extremely original in structure, composition and tone. They are also quite unlike each other, although both are drawn from short stories by Murakami Haruki. *Panya Shugeki* (*Attack on a Bakery*, 1982) is a double or triple-edged comedy about the 'democracy' that was imposed on Japan by the Americans in 1946. Its protagonist is an uncouth young labourer whose idols (and role-models) are *yakuza* film stars. He and his mate, feeling a gnawing existential hunger in their bellies, decide to go out to rob a bakery in a modern shopping centre. They are initially thwarted by the presence of another customer: a girl who takes an eternity to decide on a single, simple purchase. It happens that the shop's owner is a Communist Party member with an ideologically unsound passion for Wagner. Confronted by the young men's knives and self-proclaimed capacity for 'evil', he offers them as much bread as they can eat on condition that they listen to *Tristan and Isolde* while eating it. The bargain is struck. Later, however, the young man feels somehow cheated by the 'democracy' of the bargain, and starts punching the wall of his room in frustration. When his neighbour complains about the noise, he merely apologises—another concession to 'democracy'.

Yamakawa finds humour not only in the labourer's neanderthal nostalgia for a Japan in which men were Men (his confused and aggressive thoughts serve



Attack on a Bakery, 1982.

as a soundtrack commentary before, during and after the raid) but also in playing off sound against image. As the labourer comments on the vacillating girl customer, for instance, Yamakawa shows the girl oscillating between her reality and his perception of her within the same shot, the image exactly matching the diktat of the soundtrack. Anyone who believes the common assertion that the Japanese soul contains no irony should see *Attack on a Bakery*.

100% no Onna no Ko (*A Girl, She Is 100%*, 1983) uses both live-action and tinted and pixillated stills to construct what Yamakawa calls 'a sentimental city romance'. A man passes a woman in a backstreet in Harajuku, and knows instantly that she is 100 per cent 'his' woman. But he says nothing and she passes on. Later, he agonises over what he should have said and done, rehearsing alternative approaches in his

mind. Finally, he consoles himself with a sad story: he passes a woman in a backstreet in Harajuku, and knows instantly that she is 100 per cent 'his' woman. Happily, she agrees that he is 100 per cent 'her' man. After some moments of happy togetherness, however, they reflect that their meeting was too easy and decide to part, confident that the two halves of a 'perfect match' are bound to meet again someday. Fourteen years later, they pass each other again at the same spot. The ghost of a memory strikes both of them, but they pass on without saying anything.

This barbed little essay on the tricks and traps of fiction takes in some spirited satire along the way. Japanese sentimentality about 'perfect matches' takes the biggest knocks, but Yamakawa also lays into a number of social stereotypes to do with fashion, 'lifestyle' and male sexism. Its concision and wit ought to reduce Robbe-Grillet to tears.

A Girl, She Is 100%, 1983.



THERE are no particular conclusions to draw from this cursory survey. The film-makers are young, and there is no predicting what they will make of their careers. What is already so striking is that their work has little of the staleness that afflicts most independent cinema in the West. Whatever their strengths and weaknesses, none of these films has any sense of 'going through the motions'. They don't approach cinema as a closed set of options but as a living medium that is theirs for the exploring. They

make the received wisdom that Japanese cinema is dead look more ridiculous than ever. Right now, it seems, Tokyo is where the action is.

Like most western studies of Japanese culture, this article respects Japanese convention in the matter of names: surnames precede given names. I am indebted to Okubo Kenichi, Nishimura Takashi, Yasuoka Takaharu and Tezuka Yoshiharu for showing me the films and helping me to meet the filmmakers.—T.R.

THE ITALIAN COMEDY

David Robinson

Until 1982, the town of Pordenone, midway between Venice and Trieste, had little to show apart from the Zanussi factory and a medieval town square struggling for survival at the centre of the postwar sprawl. For the past four years, however, Pordenone has hosted the annual Giornate del Cinema Muto, whose devoted excavations of the lost monuments of silent cinema already make the festival a red-letter event for historians. In 1984 the Giornate achieved the seemingly impossible in finding enough surviving material for a retrospective devoted to the elusive Thomas Ince. In 1985 they were on home ground, investigating a still more arcane aspect of film history: the sudden blaze and equally sudden extinction of Italian comedy production in a brief five-year period before the First World War.

It is a piece of history as obscure, writes the Italian historian Gian Piero Brunetta in the Pordenone catalogue, 'as the other side of the moon... an unknown region, long removed alike from the view of the public and of the specialists.' Prolific as this cinema was—those five years produced some 500 comedies and forty comic stars—it has rated no more than a paragraph even in Italian-made histories of cinema. Where historians have troubled to mention it at all, Italian comedy production has generally been dismissed as some vague, insignificant byblow of the superior French comedy. It is certain that no living historian has until now actually seen the films, and few could identify the faces of Robinet or Kri Kri or Fricot, or even the most famous

of the clowns, Polidor and Cretinetti. Diligently gathering together the 150 remnant films from Italian comedy's golden age, however, the 1985 Pordenone Giornate began the process of setting history right.

From the first days of the cinema and *L'Arroseur Arrosé*, short comedies were a staple of film production and an infallible attraction at the box office. Yet

Ferdinando Guillaume, 'Polidor'.



it was not until a decade after the Lumière that the French film industry recognised that the production of comedies in identifiable series was a highly effective strategy in developing audience loyalties. In 1906 Pathé, the cinema's first great industrial enterprise, engaged André Deed, a music-hall singer, comic and acrobat, who had apparently had some apprenticeship in film-making at the Méliès Studios. Within a year, his character 'Boireau', seen every week in a further one-reel escapade, had won a loyal international audience. Pathé and their rivals at Gaumont, where Louis Feuillade was in charge of production, set about scouring the circuses and variety theatres for new stars who might build up comparable public followings in regular comedy series. Very soon, clowns and comedians like Max Linder, Charles Prince, Dranem, Louis-Jacques Boucot, Onésime, Calmo and Léonce provided the French cinema with a miraculously exportable product.

Coincidentally with this first great flowering of film comedy, in the years 1908-9, the Italian cinema was in the process of passing from crisis to a period of major industrial expansion. Italian producers jealously noted the success of the French comedies. Among these producers was Giovanni Pastrone, who had just (September 1908) taken over a bankrupt Turin production company, Carlo Rossi & Co, and established Itala Film, and who now despatched to Paris emissaries charged with wooing André Deed from Pathé. Pastrone's offer must have been generous: by January 1909 Deed had arrived in Turin and embarked



Gigetta Morano and Eleuterio Rodolfi, c.1914.

on a series of films which were eventually to number well over a hundred and to assure Itala's prosperity. Deed was scenarist, director and star, and for the Italian cinema's first comedy series he established a new comic identity as 'Cretinetti'. Exported to France, the Cretinetti films proved as popular as Deed's Pathé productions; and the French audiences took the metamorphosed comedian to their hearts, renaming him 'Gribouille'. Other countries also gave local names to their comic favourites. Thus in England and the United States Cretinetti became 'Foolishhead', in Germany 'Müller', in Hungary 'Lehman', in Spain and Spanish America 'Toribio', and in Russia 'Glupishkin'.

The success of Itala's Cretinetti films instantly spurred imitation. As the French firms had done, the Italian production companies frantically set about recruiting comic talent wherever they could. Itala themselves launched a 'Coco' series with the actor Pacifico Aquilanti. The rival Turin producer Arturo Ambrosio starred Ernesto Vaser, a Piedmontese comedian who had been with the firm since it was established in 1905, as 'Fricot'. A young actress in the regular company, Gigetta Morano, was also tried out, though the 'Gigetta' series was not to get under way until 1913. Ambrosio's most significant recruit was a handsome Spaniard and former circus clown, Marcel Fabre, whose character of 'Robinet' was to feature in more than 150 films during the next six years. Two other Turin firms, Aquila and Navone, also entered the comedy business.

Milano-Films, with a virtual monopoly of production in Milan, launched the French-born E. Monthus in the character of 'Fortunetti', but soon after changed his name to 'Cocciutelli'. In Rome, Cines discovered the greatest native comic star of the period when they recruited Ferdinando Guillaume, who successively adopted the comic identities of 'Tontolini' and 'Polidor'.

In France, Gaumont had struck lucky

with child comedians—Bébé Abeillard and Bout-de-Zan—and the Italian firms took up the idea with comparable success. The earliest child clown was Ambrosio's 'Firuli' (Maria Bay), launched in 1911. In 1913 Cines introduced 'Frugolino' (the 10-year-old Ermanno Roveri), and 'Cinessino' (Eraldo Giunchi, the son of Ferdinando Guillaume's brother Natalino and his wife Lea Giunchi, who as 'Lea' was one of the rare women comics of the period).

In all, the years 1910 to 1914 saw the appearance of no less than 38 of these comic personalities, as new artists were recruited or as performers moved from one company to another, shedding one mask and name and adopting another with bewildering rapidity. In some cases, as at Ambrosio, they were drawn from the studio's existing pool of acting talent; others came new to the cinema, with established reputations. Emile Vardannes, who created 'Toto' for Itala in 1911, was a French-born stage actor. Primo Cuttica (1876-1921) was already famous in variety as a performer of *macchiette*—satirical character sketches with songs, whose ridicule of the military brought him into conflict with the authorities. In his first film for Cines, he bore the name of 'Bidoni' but later reverted to 'Cuttica'. Raymond Fran, who as 'Kri Kri' was the most prolific of the comedians after Guillaume and Fabre, had worked in French circus and variety as clown and acrobat.

Of the many comics active during this brief golden age, some twenty established star series of more or less enduring popularity. Leading the rest were André Deed's Cretinetti and Ferdinando Guillaume's Tontolini and Polidor. After them came Robinet, Kri Kri and Fricot. It is more difficult to assess what seems to have been, in terms of success, the second league—Bidoni/Cuttica, Bonifacio, Camillo, Checco, Cinessino, Cocciutelli, Coco, Dick, Fringuelli, Gigetta and Rodolfi (who most often

worked as a team), Jolicoeur, Lea, Pik Nik, Riri, Tartarin and Toto—since so little (in some cases none) of their output has survived.

Indisputably the cinema's first comic star, Deed was one of the few whose popularity survived the First World War (as late as 1915 an Italian film magazine warned exhibitors that, in competition with Cretinetti, Charlie Chaplin had not a chance at the Italian box office). He was born André Chapuis in Le Havre, on 24 February 1879. After a false start as a clerk, he joined a theatrical company in Nice, and soon afterwards arrived in Paris as a singer in *café-concerts*. He is believed to have acted for Méliès, and his liking and skill for trick work may well evince the Méliès influence. His first appearance for Pathé, who recruited him in 1906, was in a 'chase' film, *La Course à la Perruque*. By 1907 he was firmly established in the Boireau series: a choice early example of his Pathé work is *Boireau a Mangé de l'Ail*, in which the hero wanders the streets of Belle Epoque Paris, blissfully unaware that passers-by are collapsing unconscious at the mere whiff of his garlicky breath. Only a stalwart carthorse maintains his feet in face of Boireau's exhalations, but even he is driven to gallop backwards (in reverse motion) taking the cart with him.

At Pathé Deed had been skilfully directed by Heuze and Capellani. In visual style his first Italian films, as Cretinetti, were a retrogression, though under his own direction the comic persona of Deed appeared in strong relief. Deed was tiny, with sharp impish features, a whirlwind of manic acrobatic activity. At the start of a film he would generally address himself to the camera, in swift, formal and precise mime, explaining the premise on which he was about to develop his comic fantasies. The essence of Deed's comedy was a single-mindedness of idiocy that in the end seemed to have its own mad logic. Thus characteristically he might make a hole

Maria Bay, 'Firuli'.



in the wall rather than enter by the door, on the principle that this seemed a more direct route. The quintessential Cretinetti film is *Cretinetti piu del Solito* (1911; *Foolshead More Than Usual* in Britain). He uses a match to light a candle to ignite a newspaper in order to light his cigarette. He leaves his house by descending from an upper window on a rope, rigs up a pulley in order to put on his coat, and does a somersault to get his head into his hat as it lies on the floor.

The same fanaticism invests all his enterprises. As a temperance zealot (*Cretinetti Antialcoolista*), he self-righteously pours away bottles of perfume and lamp fuel. As a Red Cross volunteer (*Cretinetti Volontario della Croce Rossa*, 1910), he insists on proffering medical aid to everyone in sight, however able-bodied, and endeavours to resuscitate a collapsed tailor's dummy (Deed was as fascinated by such mannequins as later were Keaton and Chaplin). Cretinetti's fanaticism appears at its peak in *Cretinetti Agente di Assicurazione*, in which he is bent on selling an insurance policy to a newly wedded couple. Concealing himself in a hatbox, he turns up in the honeymoon carriage and even in the nuptial bedchamber. By the time the couple give in, he has succeeded in bringing about the destruction of their house.

Most of Cretinetti's adventures end in massive destruction of this kind. In *Il Natale di Cretinetti* (1909), he endeavours to carry home a Christmas tree. Having disrupted the streets and bars of Turin with his burden, he knocks over a street lamp which ignites the tree. He arrives home with the denuded trunk, still smouldering brightly enough however to burn down the house and put his party guests to flight.

As an alternative to holocaust, Deed continued the tradition of the 'chase' film which was still a staple of Pathé comedy when he joined the firm. Many of the Cretinetti films are structured about the idea of a growing horde of pursuers

Lea Giunchi Guillaume, 'Lea'.



André Deed: *Cretinetti al Cinematografo*.

set on by the misdemeanours of the comedian, invariably including stout ladies, irate gents in silk hats and a brace or two of comedy cops. Deed's variations on the chase could be inventive. In *Cretinetti ha Rubato un Tappeto* (1909), a score of pursuers are spread-eagled on a stair carpet which Cretinetti drags behind him, finally shaking them off when he walks unconcernedly up the side of a house. In *Come Cretinetti Paga i Debiti*, the pursuers tumble to the ground, forming a hand to foot chain which snakes along the ground in a stop-motion effect. Cretinetti uses Méliès-style trickery with great dexterity. In the same film he repeatedly conceals himself in a small valise. Sometimes the trickwork results in surreal effects. In *Cretinetti che Bello!* (1909), his elegant suit and pointed boots attract frenzied pursuit by admiring—even lustful—ladies.* They finally capture him in a meadow, set upon him and tear him into a dozen pieces. When the coast is clear, the dismembered limbs reassemble themselves into Cretinetti for the final leering close-up.

Deed clearly recognised something infantile in the character of Cretinetti, and in a number of films he wears baby clothes and turns himself into a demonically destructive child (*Cretinetti e il Pallone*, 1910; *Cretinetti al Cinematografo*, 1911). Even as an adult there was always a baby's senselessness about him. When he turns to crime in *Cretinetti re dei Ladri* (1909), he goes for such unlikely and inconvenient loot as a bath and the wheel off a cart. Even though the Cretinetti figure remained, to the end, an accumulation of tics and spasms rather than a consistently identifiable personality, the films are full of touches of character that anticipate the early Chaplin. In full flight from his pursuers,

in *Come Cretinetti Paga i Debiti*, he can still pause to steal a kiss from a passing beauty. *Cretinetti Impiegato di Banca* has a purely Chaplinesque scene in which the comedian causes chaos on a café terrace: having started a flirtation with a lady at the next table, he continues to feel for her hand, unaware that she has meanwhile changed places with her ferocious male escort. Chaplinesque too are the adventures of *Cretinetti sulle Alpi* (1909): Deed's determined but always unsuccessful efforts to mount a snow slope recall Chaplin's battle with the stairs in *One A.M.* (1916). Shot on location, this is one of the most visually striking comedies of the period, with the unforgettable image of Cretinetti, a tangle of climbing ropes, skis and a feathered hat, amid a line of alpinists silhouetted against the sky.

While Deed's background was in French popular theatre, Ferdinand Guillaume was formed by the Italian circus tradition. He was the fifth generation of a family of performers whose ramifications through the nineteenth century circus are almost impossible to disentangle. The founder of the line, Francesco Luigi Guillaume, was apparently French (and presumably François Louis) and bore a title, Italianised as 'Barone di Lione'. He and his wife Maddalena (?Madeleine) fled from the French Revolution disguised as servants, crossing the Italian border in company with a troupe of acrobats. Subsequently, being expert riders, they invested in a number of *haute école* horses and established a circus on the lines then recently popularised by Philip Astley in London.

On Luigi's death, his son Luigi II took over the direction of the circus, and in turn handed it on to his sons Emilio and Natale, when it became the Compagnia Equestre Emilio e Natale Guillaume. The Guillaumes were prolific: Natale's family included two famous circus clowns, Bébé (Cesare Guillaume) and Antonet (Umberto Guillaume),

*The striking similarity to the chase of the would-be brides in *Seven Chances* strongly suggests that Keaton may have seen the film in his vaudeville childhood.

PRODUCTION OF ONE-REEL COMEDIES I

Actor(s)	Production Company	Foreign Names (where different)	Annual Production										Total	
			1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	after 1918	
Arnaldi	Arnaldo Tognocchi (?) Arnaldo Arnaldi (?) Achille Voller	Centauro, Turin					5	2						7
Bidoni	Primo Cuttica (1876-1921)	Cines, Rome Lux Artis, Rome				5	7	14				1		27
Bob	Nino Martinengo	Cines, Rome Vera Film, Rome Monopol Film, Rome Bob Film, Rome					3	2	3	2				10
Bonifacio	Emile Vardannes	Milano-Films, Milan	GB: Kelly, Boniface FR: Boniface			17	9							26
Butalin	Cesare Gravina	Ambrosio Film, Turin	GB: Friscot FR, HOL: Bobillard SP: Robillard			1	8	1						10
Camillo	Camillo De Riso (1854-1924)	Film Artistica Gloria, Turin Caesar, Rome						7	11	1	3			22
Cannelloni	Mario Ceccatelli	Latina Ars, Rome Niagara, Rome Gladiator, Rome							6	1				7
Checco	Giuseppe Gambardella	Cines, Rome	GB, USA: Stout FR: Grosventre SP: Pancho			16	15	6	3					40
Cinessino	Eraldo Giunchi	Cines, Rome					1	14	1	1			(+ 1 undateable)	17
Coccietelli	E Monthus (?) Emile Vardannes (after Jan. 1912)	Milano-Films, Milan	GB, USA: Kelly FR: Passe-partout SP: Testarudillo DAL: Cociuli			17	13							30
Coco	Pacifico Aquilanti (1910 series) Conte Carlo Lorenzi Soderini	Cines, Rome Aquila Film, Turin	GB, USA: Thynne FR: Allumette			8	7	4	2	4				25
Cretinetti	André Deed (né André Chapuis, (1879-?))	Itala Film, Turin	GB, USA: Foolhead FR: Gribouille GER: Müller HUN: Lehman SP, ARG: Toribio RUS: Glupishkin DAL: Kako Bedacic (1909); Kretineti, Bedakovic											108
Cuttica	Primo Cuttica	Cines, Rome	SP: Cutica					6	12					18
Dick	Cesare Quest	Milano-Films, Milan					6	10						16
Firuli	Maria Bay	Ambrosio Film, Turin	GB, USA: Tiny Tom FR: Firoulot			6	2	1	1					10
Florindo	?	Milano-Films, Milan						4						4
Fortunetti	E Monthus	Milano-Films, Milan	GB: Kelly FR: Gribollard			2								2
Fricot	Ernesto Vaser Cesare Gravina Armando Pilotti Ercole Vaser	Ambrosio Film, Turin	GB: Friscot Frescot, Fricot (1910-12); Merry Pimple (1912-13)			9	5	12	13	8	7			54
Fringuelli	Ernesto Vaser (1876-1934)	Itala Film, Turin	GB: Sparrow FR: Pépé, Pinsonnet				3	7	1					11
Frugolino	Ermanno Roveri (1903-1968)	Cines, Rome						1	3					4

who was for a time partner of *Grock*. A third son, *Onorato*, a celebrated juggler and acrobat, was in his own turn to raise three sons to the profession—*Ferdinando*, *Natalino* and *Edoardo*.

The boys were trained in every skill of the circus; and by the time he was thirteen *Ferdinando* had established his style as a clown. In 1903, he and *Natalino* abandoned the family show for the variety stage, as a double act, *Les Guill-Guill*, 'Comiques, Eccentriques, Acrobates Musicaux, Nouveaux Genre'. This decision appears to have been taken partly as a result of difficulties with their stepmother, but also because they

saw the circus already gravely threatened by the rise of variety, and in its wake the cinema.

The cinema beckoned the *Guillaume* brothers in 1909, when the *Cretinetti* films were already pouring out of Turin and every company was looking for comic stars to rival *Deed*. Count Giulio Antamoro and Count Salimeni, the producer-directors of *Cines*, saw the *Guill-Guill* duo at the Sala Umberto towards the end of 1909 and made them an offer. The brothers took a chance on the uncertain new world of the motion pictures; and in 1910 *Ferdinando* assumed the name and character of *Tonton*

lini. The first films were tentative, with the brothers simply performing their old circus numbers before the camera; but soon *Ferdinando* got into his stride. *Natalino* tired of playing stooge and in 1911 left *Cines* for *Milano Filmi*.

Towards the end of 1911 the *Pasquali* Company of Turin, still eager to compete with their local rival *Itala*, offered *Ferdinando* a substantially larger salary and a studio of his own, as well as the pay-off due to *Cines* in lieu of contract. Since *Cines* claimed rights in the *Tontonlini* character, *Ferdinando* created the new character which was to be associated with him to the end of his life,

N ITALY, CLASSIFIED BY NAMED COMICS

Actor(s)	Production Company	Foreign Names (where different)	Annual Production											Total
			1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	after 1918	
Gigetta	Gigetta Morano (1886-?)	Ambrosio Film, Turin	FR: Louisette											57
Gigiona	?	Latium Films, Rome		2				19	16	13	7			2
Groslard	?	Ambrosio Film, Turin	GB: Fatty				2							2
Jolicoeur	Armando Gelsomini	Aquila Film, Turin	GB: Longlegs FR: Jasmin SP: Jazmin											30
Kri Kri	Raymond Fran (1887-?)	Cines, Rome	GB: Bloomer FR: Patachon GER: Muchi SP: Cricri											142
Lea	Lea Giunchi Guillaume	Cines, Rome Caesar, Rome	USA: Leah				8	74	40	18	2			53
Manara	Luciano Manara	Ambrosio Film, Turin		5	17	14	12	3	2			1	2 (1919)	6
Massinelli	?	Pineschi, Rome					1							3
Pik Nik	Armando Pilotti or Armando Fineschi	Aquila Film, Turin	SP: Pick Nick											25
Polidor	Ferdinando Guillaume (1887-1977)	Pasquali, Turin Polidor-Film, Turin Caesar, Rome Tiber, Rome	FR: Polydor				40	46	33	7	12	17	5 (1920-1)	177
Procopio	?	Cines, Rome	GB: Fatty				3							3
Pyp	?	Cines, Rome							2					2
Ravioli	Annibale Moran (or Morano)	Navone Film, Turin												7
Riri	Annibale Moran (or Morano)	Savoia Film, Turin	GB: Algy, Fitzdoodle							3				23
Robinet	Marcel Fabre (né Marcel Fernandez Perez)	Ambrosio Film, Turin	GB, USA: Tweedledum GER, HOL: Nauke HUN: Hazassagi				1	19						156
Robinette/ Robinetta	Nilde Baracchi	Ambrosio Film, Turin					3	4	8					15
Rodolfi	Eleuterio Rodolfi (1876-1935)	Ambrosio Film, Turin Jupiter, Turin	FR: Rodolphi				1	30	18	13	15	1		78
Tartarin	Cesare Quest*	Centauro Film, Turin					19	11	1					31
Tontolini	Ferdinand Guillaume (1887-1977)	Cines, Rome	GB, USA: Jenkins (in 1912)				45	67	26	2	(+ 6 unidentified or undateable)			146
Toto	Emile Vardannes	Itala Film, Turin	USA: Cato				14	6	1	1				22
Villa	?	Milano-Films, Milan							3					3

*Giuseppe Gray, may have taken the role of Tartarin in some films of 1912-13, which he also directed.

The foregoing chart is based on the filmography established by Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, for the special Pordenone 1985 issue of 'Griffithiana', *I Comici del Muto Italiano*. The filmography is necessarily tentative, given the sparseness and unreliability of documentary records and the few surviving prints of the films. Undoubtedly many titles are missing, while others are duplicated, where films have appeared under variant titles. In consequence the figures in the chart may only be taken as approximate. The above figures moreover include duplications: where two or more comedians appeared in the same film (Gigetta and Rodolfi, for example, appeared together in 40 films; and around 80 other more temporary partnerships are recorded), the film is numbered in each of their personal counts. When these duplications are eliminated, an annual production record appears as follows:

1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	After 1918	Total
34	135	230	246	292	206	92	43	21	7	5	1311

Of this huge total, some 150 films are known to survive. These represent only 18 of the 41 comics in the list. None of the one-reelers made by the prolific Gigetta and Rodolfi have survived; and there is today only one extant film of Bidoni/Cuttica and Toto respectively.

Polidor—the name was taken from an old circus horse of his mother's. At Pasquali, Ferdinando was his own writer and director, with the obligation to produce a film a week (the available filmography shows only 121 titles for the years 1912-14 but is probably incomplete). The Polidor films were an instant and marked advance over the Tontolini series, both in conception and in the characterisation of the hero—a result which we can probably attribute to Guillaume's new autonomy. Pasquali could now confidently compete with Itala, and by 1912 the Polidor films had probably overtaken the Cretinettis in

popularity both at home and in the export market.

While Cretinetti was bright and brittle, Polidor was quaint and charming. He had the childlike and endearing mixture of wistful innocence and mischief that we find in Stan Laurel, and which seems to have characterised Dan Leno. The manic Cretinetti rushes into trouble with an abandoned zest; Polidor usually chances into scrapes despite all his best intentions. Romance figures large in Polidor's world: more often than not the trouble starts from his efforts to win or to shake off some lady. Polidor, for that matter, quite often is a lady.

His female impersonations are varied and enchanting. *Polidor Cambia Sesso* directly anticipates Chaplin's *A Woman*: in order to see a girl whose father opposes his suit, Polidor masquerades as a woman—only to have the lecherous father proposition him himself. In *Polidor e il Giapponese* he disguises himself as a geisha and turns the head of a Japanese prince.

In *Scandalo in Casa Polidor*, Guillaume excels himself in virtuosity by playing all five roles in a story about a lady whose jealous husband returns while she is in the arms of her lover. The film's other characters are a police



Polidor as lady and suitor in *Scandalo in Casa Polidor*.

commissioner and an importunate boy. The bedroom farce frenzy escalates as everyone collides in doorways and the whole cast (of one) ends up leaping in and out of a gigantic barrel. No doubt in this film Guillaume was endeavouring to emulate the famous eccentric transformation artist Leopoldo Fregoli (1867-1936), who was at this time famous throughout Europe. As early as 1897, Fregoli had incorporated film of his rapid costume changes into his stage act, calling the mixed entertainment (he even provided a voice from behind the screen) the 'Fregoliograph'.

Although historians are generally too facile and fanciful in likening the mixture of ritual and improvisation in 'primitive' film comedy to the *commedia dell'arte*, the notion seems much less far-fetched in the case of Guillaume-Polidor, coming as he did from the circus, where traditions had lingered longer. Deed's films generally develop a single notion—Cretinetti is superstitious, Cretinetti as hypnotist, and so on. Guillaume frequently builds his films around complex little stories which read for all the world like the *zanni* of the *commedia dell'arte*. The title as well as the plot of *Come Polidor Paga il suo Padrone di Casa* could as easily have suited an adventure for a 17th century Arlecchino. Polidor's landlord demands 100 lire rent; when he comes back to collect, Polidor's friends rig up a booby trap, and the landlord rushes off with a broken head howling for a policeman. Polidor has meanwhile disguised himself as a policeman, and directs the landlord to the pharmacist. Swiftly changing his disguise, Polidor—now-the-pharmacist provides a crazy bandage, demands 200 lire and passes him on to the dentist—Polidor again, naturally. By the time the battered landlord comes to collect his rent, Polidor is back home and pays the poor man with his own money, at the same time reading him a sanctimonious lecture about the evils of greed.

As in the *commedia*, disguises of one

sort or another—mostly adopted in the cause of winning a lady—figure regularly in the Polidor films. In *Polidor coi Baffi* a rich American lady advertises for a husband, the only qualification required being a well-developed moustache. Polidor applies, sporting huge false whiskers. Subsequently, when caught unaware and undisguised in the street, he steals in turn a dog's tail and an officer's plume to supply his facial nakedness. His gift for mimicry, along with the sweet absurdity of his diminutive figure and clownish face, give special piquancy to his swaggering in *Polidor Apache*. His stature provides the joke of *L'Amico Intimo di Polidor*, in which he befriends an extraordinary young giant who is at least twice his own height. Their problems in sharing a bed anticipate Stan and Ollie.

Many of Polidor's anecdotes would only be possible on film. Playing a manservant in *Polidor e i Gatti*, having mislaid the kittens he is baby-sitting in his master's absence abroad, he steals some replacements, unaware that they are baby lions. The joke depends entirely on seeing the animals grow progressively into monstrous beasts which destroy an elegant bourgeois apartment. The film amply illustrates the growing ambitions of these early film comedies. The shadow of bars reveals that the sets were built in a cage; and one hasty cut indicates the risks Guillaume ran in working directly with the animals. Polidor's filmic enterprise is equally revealed in the precocious effects of montage and superimposition for the brain surgery sequence in *Il Cervello di Polidor* (1914)—a science fiction comedy in which a mix-up at the brain clinic causes silly Polidor and a stout and misanthropic old professor to exchange brains and personalities.

A mere dozen or so films survive from the huge output of Kri Kri, produced by Cines of Rome. Kri Kri was the creation of the French actor Raymond Fran, born

in Senegal in 1887, and professionally known as Ovaro. Like Guillaume, his exact contemporary, he came to films from a career as clown-acrobat in circuses. Entering pictures in 1912, he established a much more suave and dandified style than Polidor, based perhaps on Max Linder—though in face and figure he rather more resembles Tommy Trinder or the young Fernandel. Kri Kri is knowing, where Cretinetti and Polidor are innocent, if not idiot; and his surviving films show great variety and invention. Kri Kri occasionally aspires to the surreal: in *Kri Kri Detective* (1912), in order the better to conceal his police force he uses a mallet to flatten the cops to tabloid form.

Two of Kri Kri's finest surviving one-reelers are remarkable anticipations of Max Linder's American features *The Three Must-Get-Theres* and *Seven Years' Bad Luck*. In *Un Sogno di Kri Kri* (1913) he dreams that he is D'Artagnan in a somewhat anachronistic *Three Musketeers* (he changes his horse for a motorcar). Kri Kri has a charming sense of the absurd: his D'Artagnan bows so obsequiously each time he meets the king that he topples over. *Kri Kri Domestico* (1913) appears to be the first and also the most sophisticated cinema representation of the broken mirror gag which originated in 19th century music halls, and was used in turn by Chaplin, Linder and the Marx Brothers. The essence of the gag is that, having broken a cheval glass, the servant deceives his myopic master by standing behind the empty mirror-frame, 'reflecting' the master's every move. The other comedians simply had the servant dress as a double of the master. Kri Kri's refinement is to permit the servant to play a much more subtle trick upon him. When the master mistakenly puts on a bowler hat, for instance, the 'reflection' reassures him that it is a top hat; when the master puts on the servant's white jacket, the 'reflection' puts on the correct morning coat. The result is that the

Natalino Guillaume.



master turns up at a grand reception so absurdly dressed that he is humiliated and thrown out.

Marcel Fabre, the creator of Robinet, also began his career as a clown in French circuses. Of Spanish origin, he was born Marcel Fernandez Perez and had appeared in comedies for Pathé and Eclair before Ambrosio took him to Turin in the great recruitment of 1910. He was to make more than 150 comedies for Ambrosio, of which barely a dozen or so remain. Robinet was a cheerful, startlingly handsome youngster and the charm of his films is the manic enthusiasm with which he assaults each new enterprise, whether it is winter sports, aviation, boxing, cycling, acting or dancing. Ambrosio for a time provided Robinet with a charming partner, Robinette (Nilde Baracchi).

The role of Fricot was passed from actor to actor, but he appears to have retained the essential character first created by Ernesto Vaser, a small, tubby, cheerful fellow with an unfortunate way of precipitating avalanches of catastrophe with his smallest action. In *Fricot Cuts His Finger* (where the actor seems to be Cesare Gravina), Fricot's initial injury is slight; but the ministrations of a series of good Samaritans produce such dreadful accidents that he ends up with amputation and trepanning. In *Fricot ha Freddo* (1913) he warms himself by setting light to his furniture, thereby burning down the entire house.

This film exemplifies a recurrent motif in both French and Italian comedies—the vertical destruction of buildings. The force of destruction may pass upwards, like the fire in this case, or downwards if it is a flood or some great falling missile. In either event the object was to show the successive disruption of a variety of domestic tableaux: the Fricot film builds a comic crescendo as we watch the effects of the fire progressing upwards through a photographer's studio, a crowded office, a musical recital, a bedroom with a

André Deed: an unidentified Cretinetti film.



Polidor e i Gatti (1913).

sleeping occupant and a sculptor's studio where three male poseurs are thrown off balance as the fire toasts their bare feet.

It is not surprising, given the huge output of this brief period, that certain comic themes and motives are persistent. Practically every comedian made at least one boxing picture; there are innumerable virago mothers-in-law; and Aldo Bernardini has pointed out in the Pordenone catalogue the curious frequency of attempted suicide (*Il Suicidio di Ravioli*, *Jolicoeur Vuol Morire di Fame*, *Lea Vuol Morire*, *Polidor Vuol Suicidarsi*, *Suicidio di Riri*, *Kri Kri s'impicca*, *Polidor al Club della Morte*, *Cretinetti si Vuol Suicidare* all appeared between 1909 and 1913). With films turned out week by week, it was inevitable that the comedies took note of every novelty, craze and topical event. The telephone, the gramophone, motorcars, flying machines, suffragettes, temperance campaigns, unemployment, Futurism, all were grist to the mill. The cinema itself was fair game: Cretinetti destroys the Itala movie theatre in *Cretinetti al Cinematografo*; Kri Kri made a parody of *Quo Vadis* and little Cinessino played *Fantomas* (*Cinessino imita Fantomas*, 1914).

Aldo Bernardini has moreover stressed how the comedians, in their choice of on-screen occupations, sought to identify themselves with the large part of their audience. 'I don't think it is accidental that these comic personages generally choose the most humble jobs on the screen: the most recurrent are mechanic, soldier, policeman, driver, porter, waiter, fireman, paper-hanger, shop-boy; the better qualified may rise to be a municipal or bank clerk, dancing master, travel clerk or detective. In other cases, however, the actors interpret roles that relate to their own origins and professions, displaying athletic prowess in the roles of boxer, wrestler, rope-walker, trainer, gymnast and acrobat. This dominant popular character inevitably

resulted in grossness and vulgar attitudes (the paunch or behind of corpulent persons, for example, was always an effective instrument for attack or defence); but these are also demonstrations of human liberty and spontaneity of invention, which permit the comics to treat and to pillory certain values of bourgeois complacency. For instance, the comedy of many situations comes precisely from the fact that the protagonist breaks the formal rules prevailing in salons, in dentists' waiting rooms, in smart restaurants or at official dinners. Sometimes one has the impression that this genre provides a sort of free zone, emancipated from the bourgeois frustrations which are conversely punctiliously respected in the historical or dramatic films of the period, dominated as they are by moralism, the cult of patriotism, fine sentiments, respectability.'

The Italian comedians certainly did the clown's duty by pomp and authority. Cops, firemen, bosses, schoolteachers and officialdom at large were all fair game. Among the films brought to light by the Pordenone Giornate was an anonymous and undated Cines masterpiece, *I Pompieri di Serrabianca*. It opens with a civic inspection of the fire brigade, who solemnly present arms—in the form of diminutive watering-cans—as they are inspected by the Mayor. At this precise moment in a nearby apartment building a gentleman's cigar accidentally ignites his newspaper. The firemen rush into action, scaling the building, tearing off the roof and demolishing the place, in approved style, floor by floor. When they reach the scene of the alarm, the conflagration has already extinguished itself though the newspaper is still gently smoking—a spectacle which so alarms the fire chief that he swoons among the ruins effected by his doughty force.

Here, as throughout the repertory, we can perceive an ageless and age-old comic tradition of defiance and

disrespect. From medieval buffoons to music hall and comic strip there is a continuity of story-telling through rude and simple anecdotes, familiar in setting, knockabout in action, iconoclastic and preferably touched with childlike improbity—an element which became less marked with the introduction in Italy of national censorship in 1913.

Without any artistic aspirations—this was their strength—the comedies of this short enchanted era made their own distinctive contribution to the development of film style. While the cultural pretensions of more prestigious dramatic and costume films led their makers to borrow style as well as respectability from the stage, the comedians were unfettered by such inhibitions. They ranged freely; much of the time they shot in the streets, catching the atmospheres of everyday life; yet at the same time they were employing and exploring all the artifices of camera trickery. The rhythm of talented mimes was imposed upon the films themselves.

What of the old historians' view of the prewar Italian comedy as a mere inferior imitation of French comic production? It is true that the first impetus came from France, as did two major stars, Deed and Fabre: but even their Italian films had something indigenous and inimitable. The streets and houses and homes, the life and manners of the petit bourgeoisie whose well-ordered lives our heroes so carefully observed and so recklessly disrupted, convey unmistakably the world and concerns of prewar urban Italy. And though some basic forms of the one-reel comedy may have been imported, the films of the Italian comedians drew heavily and profitably on earlier, native lines of popular comedy—circus, vaudeville, and a tradition of *spettacolo da piazza* stretching back to the *commedia*.

August 1914 signalled the end of Italy's comic flowering. The reasons were economic, and paradoxically resulted in

part from the huge international success of Italian films in the immediate prewar period. Success had fired ambition; the costume spectacles had become more and more extravagant and even the later comedies reveal much greater expenditure on production. The industry underwent a rapid, artificial inflation, a bubble which burst inevitably and irrevocably when the outbreak of the War abruptly shrank the foreign markets. Comedy production was only one victim of what was to become an escalating decline in the Italian film industry.

After so short a time, moreover, this bright generation of fools had become archaic, primitive. In America Mack Sennett's comedies, initially inspired by European examples, had moved fast in technical sophistication thanks to the lessons learned from Griffith at Biograph. Chaplin arrived at Sennett's Keystone at the beginning of 1914 and by 1915 the whole world was aware of him, and of a New World style of comedy with which the charming knockabout of Cretinetti and Tontolini, rooted in their ancient traditions, could not compete.

Comedy production shrank dramatically, from a peak of 292 films in 1913 and 206 in 1914 to 92 in 1915, thereafter dwindling until only seven comic shorts (five with Polidor) appeared in 1918. Some of the stars of the prewar years disappear without trace from history, like strolling players the morning after the show. Others, like Cuttica, returned to the variety stage from which they had come. A few—Giuseppe Gambardella (Checco), Ernesto Vaser (Fricot)—remained in films as actors. Camillo De Riso (Camillo) became a director. Raymond Fran (Kri Kri) returned to France and enjoyed some success there with a new comedy character, 'Dandy'. Cesare Gravina went to Hollywood as a character actor and became a favourite with Stroheim.

Marcel Fabre also tried his luck in America, where he arrived a few days

before Italy entered the War. An attempt to re-establish his character of Robinet at the Jester Comedies company failed; and in the 1920s he was directing quickie Westerns starring Pete Morrison. Robert Florey claims to have met him by chance in a Hollywood hospital towards the end of his life. An accident while filming had necessitated a leg amputation. Robinet died, quite forgotten, in 1929.

André Deed returned to France to film as Boireau in 1912, came back to Italy to make a few more Cretinetti comedies during the War, and then went home again to work as a director, his own comic star evidently burnt out. The end of his life and career is a mystery. There is a persistent legend that he was working in the 20s as a night watchman at the Pathé studios, where once he had reigned, but no record of the place or date of his death has as yet come to light.

Guillaume-Polidor was more fortunate. His huge popularity prolonged his career after the collapse of Italian comedy production, although his rate of production slowed markedly. In 1916 he made a few Polidor films for Caesar Film and the following year was with another Rome company, Tiber Films, but in 1918 returned briefly to Pasquali. In 1919 he fulfilled an old ambition and founded his own company, Polidor Films. Now producer as well as writer-director and star, he made a series of modestly successful comedy features during 1920-21. Finally he gave way before the industrial crises of the early 20s and returned to the stage, establishing his own 'Teatro della Risata' in which he performed as a comedy link between variety acts. This theatre lasted throughout the 20s. Later he appeared from time to time in films, most notably in *Le Notte di Cabiria* and *La Dolce Vita*—Fellini loved such old artists. His last film appearance was in Fernando Di Leo's *Rose Rosse per il Fuhrer* (1968). Ferdinando Guillaume died at the age of 90 in 1977.

Paying their tribute, the Giornate del Cinema Muto of Pordenone discovered that there was still one survivor from this forgotten golden age: the vivacious Gigetta Morano, Italy's first female comic star, who continued in films and made her last screen appearances in *I Vitelloni* and *Ottobre e Mezzo*. Now nearing 100, as insubstantial as a dried leaf, propped up in a hospital bed and certain only of death just around the corner, Gigetta nevertheless consented to tape an interview, and clearly enjoyed being in front of the camera one more time. She still remembered things clearly: how they made films in half a day, and the fun they had, and the hard work; and the one and only love who was killed at the front in '15; and all the others: 'Brav' uomini... Tutti bravi...' ■

Marcel Fabre, 'Robinet' (1910).



This article was made possible by the remarkable retrospective of some 150 Italian comic films from the period 1909-1915—practically all that survive—organised by the 1985 Pordenone Giornate del Cinema Muto; and by the Filmography compiled by Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli for the accompanying publication I Comici del Muto Italiano.

Better than a black-board

DEREK MALCOLM's personal reflections on two years as Director of the London Film Festival

'EXCUSE ME,' said the large, irate-sounding gentleman in the foyer of the National Film Theatre, 'do you work here?' I wasn't sure what to reply, it being a week before the London Film Festival of 1984, when the shock of organising my first LFF was still fresh upon me. It flitted through my mind that the better part of valour would be to deny everything and flee. But I didn't, and I got an earful.

He had, he explained with some vigour, sent in his advance booking form with eight festival choices, and had been told, after a week's wait, that they were all sold out. 'What a way to run a railway,' he added with some vehemence. 'If I could get hold of the director, I'd shove my programme down his throat! Who is he anyway?' 'Tony Smith,' I heard myself answering, 'but

he's not here at the moment. Can I take a message?'

I was, of course, the one he wanted, not the Director of the British Film Institute. But to this day, even in more favourable circumstances, I find that to be known as a festival director is not an unalloyed joy. For one thing, you tend to get rotten treatment at any other festival bar your own, compared at least to being regarded as a critic, when most doors are open to you, even if reluctantly on occasions. Festivals, on the whole, are depressingly suspicious of those they regard as competitors. And even at your own, no matter how many compliments are paid, it's the grumbles you remember—about the films you've chosen, the way they are programmed, the lot.

There are times when you heartily wish you were back at your critic's job

with irate-sounding gentlemen reduced to writing complaining letters from afar. 'Dear Mr Malcolm,' wrote one quite recently, 'I have just read your reviews of *Back to the Future* and *A Zed & Two Noughts*. They have given me no idea which is the most suitable for my niece. This is most distressing, since I look to you for guidance and clearly have not



A.K.
(France/Japan)

NFT1, 1.30 PM

380 tickets sold (82% capacity)
UK distributor Virgin Vision (before LFF)

found it.' I can think of at least four different and equally effective replies. But you haven't got much of a leg to stand on at the LFF when someone tells you, as someone actually did, that either *Back to the Future* or *A Zed & Two Noughts* would have been excellent LFF choices, but to put both on the programme was indefensible. All you can say is 'Why?'

Yet running a festival does tend to get under the skin, since you always feel you could do better if given just one more chance. It is the most curious of occupations, much like a difficult pregnancy, the pain of which is forgotten (or so some say) when the bouncing baby is finally produced. If the crowds arrive, and by and large pronounce themselves satisfied, as they appear to have done at the last two LFFS, the trials of mounting the event, and the loss of sleep and sanity entailed, seem a bit like something that never happened.

But trials there are, and each of the many festivals busily springing up all over the world probably has a different set of them. The London Festival, now in



Becky Sharp
(USA, 1935)

NFT1, 8.45 PM

367 tickets sold (79% capacity)
National Film Archive
No UK theatrical distribution

the throes of its thirtieth year, is at least lucky in one respect. There is no competition, so the politics of choosing films and juries, and bringing the two together satisfactorily, is mercifully absent. A competitive festival, of course, breeds much more publicity but costs much more money. And the more I speak to film-makers, the more I find they are relieved that London does not put them through this kind of nerve-wracking hoop-la. They do, on the whole, feel that they can come to London with a film which will be decently presented and have a chance of being noticed without the uncomfortable process of being judged once and for all as a success or failure.

Prizes undoubtedly help those who win them to sell their product to buyers, whose minds are sometimes wonderfully concentrated by a citation. But the disadvantages of the jury system, with all its attendant provocations, seem to me to outweigh that. Given enough money in an ideal world to run the London Festival without the financial constraints that exist, I doubt if one would think seriously about making that sort of change.

But what could one do to develop the event, given the very severe budgeting



The Satin Slipper
(France/Portugal/W. Germany/USSR)
NFT2, 8.30 PM
132 tickets sold (81% capacity)
uk distributor Cannon-Gala (before LFF)

that exists? Not a lot, perhaps, unless private sponsorship was sought. This ought to be thought about, since the stage has now been reached where staff are stretched to the utmost by the proliferation of venues, and thus of films, and by the task of satisfying the perfectly legitimate demands of the many more critics and delegates who have been attracted from abroad.

The fact that everyone connected with the LFF now works beyond the obvious call of duty is undoubtedly due to the policy of expansion that first Ken Wlaschin and now myself have followed. Had the LFF been scaled down to around a hundred films, the vast majority of them presented at the NFT, life would have been a great deal easier for everybody. Perhaps this should indeed happen. Some people, especially inside the BFI, would argue for this as the most sensible course of action, given the

shortage of resources. But it would be a different kind of festival, and I very much doubt whether it would then attract the attention either of the large number of non-members who now go, or of those abroad who have welcomed the expansion as providing the most comprehensive survey of the current state of world cinema there is on the circuit.



Banana Cop
(Hong Kong)
ICA, 1.00 PM
173 and 172 tickets sold (83% capacity)
uk distributor Tai Films (after LFF)

There is no doubt at all in my mind that the LFF's increased publicity, both in Britain and elsewhere, is good for the BFI and for the NFT. It also encourages the mainstream companies and distributors to feel that neither the BFI nor the NFT is invariably in some kind of opposition to them. This has certainly been said to me frequently over the past two years. And the result has been far fewer refusals from the large worldwide organisations to which I have gone for films. Broadening the appeal of the LFF is not a sin, though some would have it so, because in their view it has led to a less rigorous selection process and an 'unstructured' approach.

An article in the *New Statesman*, for instance, accused the LFF of now being a vast supermarket, whose wares were not shelved satisfactorily enough for any convenient definition, and which drew to London a large number of film-makers who appeared to have nothing much to do except speak briefly, in a thoroughly unprepared way, after each showing of their films. Point taken. But it did not seem to me that the writer (not John



The Package Tour
(Hungary)
Everyman, 6.30 PM
154 tickets sold (54% capacity)
As yet no uk distributor

Coleman, by the way) had been to too many other festivals. Had she done so, she might very well have said the same thing, or variants of it. That, generally speaking, is what large festivals are. But they do have their uses. And so does the LFF.

The 1985 festival's 160-film programme not only attracted record attendances, suggesting that the public at any rate did not feel drowned by movies, but succeeded in getting over 70 per cent of the films sold either to the cinema or television, and in some cases both. That isn't a negligible achievement, even though quite a large proportion of that 70 per cent was, of course, bought before the LFF began. It has, however, now become an excellent unofficial market, for both distributors and exhibitors in Britain and abroad; which, in the present restricting climate, must be beneficial. The *New Statesman* went on to say that a large number of films were



What Sex Am I?
(USA)
NFT1, 11.15 PM
389 tickets sold (83% capacity)
As yet no uk distributor

given to the LFF to ensure a good write-up in the *Guardian*! If so, they won't all get that accolade, since one of the first principles of my two LFFS has been to take advice from as many other critics and writers about film as possible, even when I don't agree with it. The spread of opinion is, I think, valuable if only because it is reflected by audiences too.

As for the structured approach, that is much easier said than done, since you are likely to find yourself forcing films into pigeonholes only you think they fit and which the film-makers themselves instinctively dislike. Chris Marker's excellent *A.K.*, for instance, could have been in a documentary slot, or in a section devoted to film-makers on film-makers. But he told me how relieved he was that the LFF was not sectionalised in this way. And, incidentally, that the very wide spread of films of all kinds seemed to him (who very seldom can be persuaded to visit festivals, but comes to London's whenever he can) to be the right policy, since it enabled people to see as much as possible of what is at present available, and to make their own judgments. I hope he won't mind me quoting his remarks because I value them immensely. People, I feel, are



The Insurance Man and Past Caring
(UK)
NFT1, 2.00 and 8.00 PM
388 tickets sold for each performance
(83% capacity)
BBC TV: no UK theatrical distributor

capable of making the connections themselves, and I'm not sure they want others to do it for them in the ambience of a festival. Screens are better than blackboards any day.

At the same time, it would be nice to be able to use those film-makers who wished it rather better than we manage at the LFF. It is, however, extremely difficult to organise anything more coherent than a general atmosphere of relaxed friendliness, for which the LFF was noted long before I have into view as director. Even a liaison officer, specially appointed, would find it hard going. While it is true that, at any one point in the LFF's progress, there are up to a dozen film-makers present, they are a disparate lot and tend to avoid being organised. Nor would it be easy to group, say, the documentaries together and thus have those film-makers at the same time. They come from all points of the globe, and often from other festivals, like Nantes and Chicago, whose dates clash with London.

Specific dates are so often requested for individual films that any such grouping would inevitably be doomed to



Taipei Story
(Taiwan, China)
ICA, 8.45 and 6.15 PM
179 and 164 tickets sold (86% and 79% capacity)
As yet no UK distributor

failure. Besides, distributors' dates have to be taken notice of too, which would increase the uncertainty. Even a much smaller LFF could not effectively get over this problem, which is aggravated by the fact that those who buy the films are increasingly pernickety about how

often and where they are shown.

Besides, the one thing I have learnt from running the LFF—with what I must say is the devoted assistance of everybody at the NFT and some, but not quite enough, at the BFI—is that you have to steer a course that's halfway between what you would like and what you think the public will wear. Anyone programming a repertory cinema knows this for a continually painiting fact, and it is as true of festivals at which the numbers game matters because of box-office considerations. What seems to me indisputable is that it is more difficult to structure programmes for cultural or academic purposes than it has been for some time, at least for general audiences. The reason for this is puzzling, but part of it has got to be that this is hardly what one might call a progressive time.

It is, in fact, the very reverse. It is now a hard business to persuade anyone much to see a 'difficult' film, or one which might need and encourage argument and discussion. I had this fact forcefully brought home to me not at the LFF, though it has happened there too,



Adieu, Bonaparte
(Egypt/France)
Queen Elizabeth Hall, 5.00 PM
338 tickets sold (33% capacity)
As yet no UK distributor

but at the *Guardian*, in which I not so long ago foolishly described a film as 'the most provoking film, in feminist terms, of the year.' Thanks a lot, said the exhibitor on the phone next day, you've just killed us stone dead. She wasn't sure whether the word 'provoking' or 'feminist' was the more dangerous, but quite certain that together they were a recipe for disaster.

It is notorious that programme notes which hint at anything other than unalloyed entertainment at the LFF are usually those which don't sell a film to the customers. There are exceptions, but not very many. In this atmosphere, which I would be the last to say was satisfactory, you have to move very carefully indeed in mounting a programme. Everything that ought to be included should be included, but you do have to leave the pill, and would-be distributors will not tell you any differently.

I am now progressing towards my third LFF, somewhat uncertainly because at this stage you doubt whether you will

ever see a good film again which isn't gratefully snatched from your grasp by a distributor to put on before November. At the moment, sixteen cinemas outside the NFT have requested part of the



Silverado
(USA)
Queen Elizabeth Hall, 5.00 PM
931 tickets sold (90% capacity)
UK distributor Columbia-EMI-Warner (before LFF)

programme, and that's a compliment I value almost as much as Chris Marker's. Needless to say, we'd need three hundred films to use them all and a dozen more members of staff to manage them. Don't worry. It will not be done. But basically my instinct is to continue to broaden the appeal of the LFF, which already has, thanks to the BFI's distribution department, the most ambitious travelling festival that exists anywhere.

That the LFF has so many financial and staffing constraints is infuriating, but at this point inevitable. So have the rest of the arts institutions left in this country. But to draw our horns in now would seem some kind of abdication while the crowds continue to come and the general enthusiasm to heighten. The atmosphere not only at the NFT but at outside venues like the Lumière, the ICA, the Everyman and the London Film-makers' Co-op seemed to me more or less as the atmosphere of a festival should be. Far better than I dared hope when first branching out in 1984. But it all depends, first and foremost, on the films themselves. The hunt is on, and any advice will be gratefully accepted. Anyone seen anything good from Bolivia yet? ■



'New' Women Film-makers
(Super-8 and 16mm) (UK)
London Film-makers' Co-op, 4.00 PM
140 tickets sold (100% capacity)
UK distributor London Film-makers' Co-op
(before LFF)

DENHAM STUDIOS

The Golden Jubilee of Korda's Folly

SARAH
STREET

Alexander Korda created Denham in 1936, as the studio he could use to continue the crusade to create a British film industry worthy of the nation and culture he had adopted as his own. In the next fifteen years many of the best British feature films were made at Denham, including *Rembrandt* (1936), *Fire Over England* (1937), *The Citadel* (1938), *South Riding* (1938), *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939), *The Stars Look Down* (1939), *In Which We Serve* (1942), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *Odd Man Out* (1947). Ironically, of these only

Rembrandt and *Fire Over England* were Korda productions.

Back in 1926 the idea of such a lavish studio would have been unthinkable. Such production as there was came mainly from Beaconsfield, Bushey, Ealing, Elstree, Isleworth, Teddington and Twickenham. A weak production base, exacerbated by intense Hollywood competition, threatened to close nearly every British studio. The Cinematograph Films Act came to the rescue in 1927 by apportioning an annually



Above: Denham in the 1930s. Right: Alexander Korda.

increasing percentage, or 'quota', of screen time to British pictures. New film companies mushroomed in its wake and after a painful period of adjustment to 'the talkies' it became easier to finance, distribute and show British films.

The value of British films in production soared from £500,000 in 1928 to £7 million by 1937 and the British share of the home market crept up from 4.4 per cent in 1927 to 21.5 per cent by 1931. But very few were good films and serious problems were left unsolved, the major one being the inequitable distribution of box-office receipts. The public spent £40 million a year on cinema entertainment, and after the deduction of £5 million in Entertainment Tax the rest of the spoils were divided among the trade. Exhibitors retained the lion's share of £22 million; renters were paid £13 million out of which British producers pocketed a paltry £3 million.

The major film studios were clustered in and around London, with a total of 26 stages estimated to be capable of producing 257 pictures a year, or more than twice the national production. The location of British studios reflected the film industry's traditional links with and dependence on the London stage. But the distance between studios like Elstree and Teddington made it difficult to interchange equipment. Employees living in central London could spend anything up to two hours travelling to work in studios as far-flung as Welwyn or Beaconsfield.

Alexander Korda, who had produced films in Hungary, Vienna, Berlin, Hollywood and Paris, came to London at the end of 1931 to work for Paramount British, a company that was anxious to make enough good, bad and more often than not indifferent British films to comply with the letter of the Films Act and at the same time continue to import a large number of its parent company's latest high-class pictures. Korda's own company, London Film Productions, was founded in February 1932. He was assisted by Lajos Biro, a Hungarian playwright and novelist who had worked on films with Korda since his Vienna stint in 1920. Biro became London Films' scenario chief, George Grossmith was enlisted as Chairman and Captain A. C. N. Dixey, a Conservative MP, was joint managing director. Steven Pallos, the Hungarian film director who had urged Korda to settle in Europe, became foreign manager. The new company's first film, *Wedding Rehearsal*, brought back Roland Young from Hollywood and introduced four stars, Merle Oberon, Wendy Barrie, Joan Gardner and Diana Napier. Korda's association with Paramount was renewed after *Wedding Rehearsal* when London Films delivered a further batch of 'quota quickies' including *Men of Tomorrow*, giving Robert Donat his screen debut.

London Films went on to score a major international success with *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933, costing £97,710), won a United Artists distribution contract and financial backing from the Prudential Assurance Company. It is

unlikely that Denham would have been built without *Henry VIII*. The picture transformed London Films into a major producer of films intended to storm world markets, an unusual feat when British films normally found it almost impossible to get a showing in the States. On the day it was premiered at New York's Radio City Music Hall, 12 October 1933, £7,500 was taken at the box-office. By April 1937 the film had earned £210,000. Vital completion money for *Henry VIII* had come from United Artists after Richard Norton, a friend of George Grossmith, persuaded Sam Goldwyn and Joseph Schenck to back Korda. Indeed, the United Artists link was clearly instrumental in encouraging the Prudential to open its coffers to London Films and finance the construction of Denham.

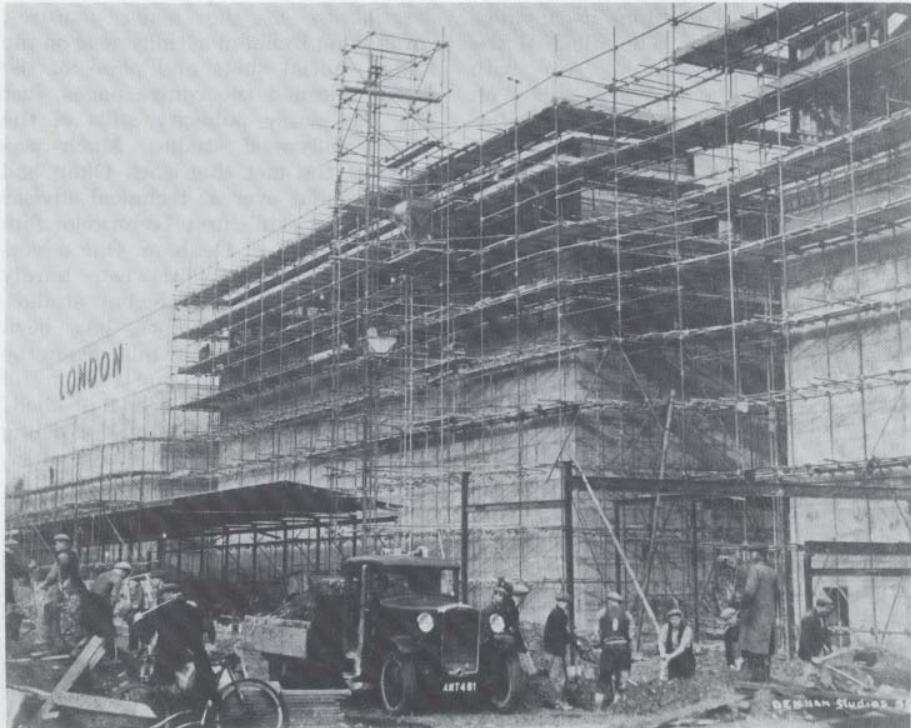
It is difficult to judge how involved the Prudential intended to become with Korda. Their records show that when the initial investment was made in 1934 the company's main concern was to enlist a first-class producer to exploit and perfect the new 'Hillman' colour process owned by Colourgravure, a subsidiary of Gerrard Industries, a company in which the Prudential owned shares. This, the first of many deals between the Prudential and London Films, was instigated by Montagu Marks, an Australian businessman based in America who had links with the film industry. He came to Britain to investigate the 'Hillman' process and suggested to Gerrard Industries that Korda, a producer whose 'star had risen high', was the best man for the job of experimenting with colour.

Marks told Gerrard Industries' Camera Committee that as soon as Korda had examined the process he was 'far-seeing enough to visualise its potential value.' Marks introduced Korda to Sir Connop Guthrie of the Prudential, who persuaded his colleagues to invest

in London Films by arguing: 'It would seem difficult to handle the colour process by itself, and if we have to associate it with an existing firm of producers we could not do better than obtain the practical assistance of Mr Korda. As a producer he is particularly interested in specialising in the larger class of character pictures which, in his opinion, demand representation in colour in order that the best effects of scenery, dress, etc, can be obtained.' Later Korda concentrated his attention on Technicolor, and together with Technicolor, Gerrard Industries and the Prudential registered British Technicolor in 1935. But ironically the first colour film to be produced in Britain at Denham was made not by Korda but by New World Pictures, a subsidiary of Twentieth Century-Fox, Robert T. Kane's *Wings of the Morning* (1937).

Armed with new financial backing, Korda was relieved to be free from the stringent terms (4½ per cent interest rate and 4 per cent premium to insurance companies) of loans of £400,000 from Lloyds and Hambros Bank. At last he could envisage ambitious plans for his company after *Henry VIII*'s success had pointed the way to expansion. A new distribution contract with United Artists also boded well for London Films. Korda was made a partner of the American company in 1935, joining Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Sam Goldwyn and Charlie Chaplin. Only five years earlier Korda had left Hollywood disillusioned and humiliated. *Henry VIII* finally made him acceptable across the Atlantic, and on the day that the news of the partnership hit the headlines the directors' branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences honoured Korda with a dinner. But his love-hate relationship with Hollywood continued to be carried on from an English base.

The studio under construction.



Plans for London Films to build its own studio dated back to 1934, when the company estimated that about £15,000 would be lopped off the cost of each film if it owned instead of rented studio space and offices. Korda was paying £20,000 a year in rental to British and Dominion for studios at Elstree and the tenancy agreement was due to expire on 15 January 1935. And on top of the high rent, Korda claimed he was being charged in varying sums an extra £17,000 a year for overheads, totting up his rental to £37,000. Korda and Marks consulted the Prudential and presented plans for the purchase of land and studio apparatus estimated to cost £200,000. Over the next three years the various estimates increased: in November 1934 the figure was £350,000, but the final cost turned out to be nearly three times that amount at £993,817.

Studio building was no new experience for Korda, who had built the impressive Corvin Studios near Budapest in 1917. The original plans for the new studios for London Films proposed buying 70 acres of land at Elstree and taking an option on the remaining 60 acres for three years. An up-to-date laboratory was also envisaged at a cost of £50,000. The Prudential's enthusiasm hinged on an over-optimistic assessment of London Films' future production plans. The company submitted statements showing that many new stories had been bought for potential pictures. At the end of 1934, some of the stories purchased for a total of £100,000 included 'The Reign of King George V' by Winston Churchill, 'Whither Mankind' by H. G. Wells, 'Sir Tristam Goes West' to be directed by René Clair, 'The Marshall' starring Maurice Chevalier, 'Young Mr Disraeli' by Elizabeth Thane, 'The Broken Road' by A. E. W. Mason, 'Fregoli' for Charles Laughton, 'Queen Elizabeth' to star Flora Robson, 'Lawrence of Arabia', 'Gordon and the Mahdi' with Leslie Banks and Paul Robeson, 'Claudius the God' for Charles Laughton, 'Pocahontas' with Merle Oberon, 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold', 'Joan of Arc' with Elisabeth Bergner. With such an impressive list of forthcoming films (most of which were never made), the Prudential had no qualms about sanctioning the studio project.

Korda did not choose Denham. Although the studios came to be known as his workshop and brainchild, it is ironic that he had no hand in selecting the site. Montagu Marks, who by then was on Korda's payroll as general manager of London Films, and Jack Okey, the designer of Hollywood studios including Paramount and First National, opted for a 193-acre site on an estate called 'The Fishery' north of Denham Village and owned by Lord Forres. Marks went ahead and purchased a 30-day option on the site for £10,000 while Korda was in Spain. But on his return Korda agreed with Marks' choice and the great studio plan was launched in June 1935. By May 1936, after disruptions caused by a fire during construction and a bitterly cold winter, the



Korda on the set of *Rembrandt* with Gertrude Lawrence.

studios were completed. Even before they were finished, filming had begun in the grounds of Denham for *Moscow Nights* (cost £52,327), *The Ghost Goes West* (£156,062), *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (£133,104) and *Things to Come* (£241,028).

In just under a year the biggest film studios in Britain were ready for filming and the *London Reporter* proudly announced: 'Alongside the group of great pictures which the company has made, has developed this mighty studio. The plan has gone steadily forward from an inspiration to the reality facing us today. That reality is worthy of London Films; it is worthy of the British picture industry; it sets new standards.'

When the studios were launched the film trade press published detailed descriptions of the major features, christening Denham a 'Hollywood on the Colne'. Aerial shots and plans of the layout adorned the centre pages, just like the glossy publicity stills of the major Hollywood studios. Much was made of the fact that Jack Okey had been brought over as technical adviser and that Britain's first Technicolor film was to be shot at Denham. One advertisement stated: 'Words can hardly describe the wonders of the new studios, where every convenience has been studied and every worthwhile idea in the design, layout and construction of modern film studios has been embodied.'

Denham had seven stages totalling 110,500 square feet of stage area. Although Denham was clearly the biggest studio in Britain it was a long way behind the Warner Brothers studio, Burbank, with its eighteen stages and 500,000 square feet of stage area. Four of Denham's stages were air-conditioned and all seven were fully sound-proofed. Each stage was well equipped, with electricians' galleries in the roof for sophisticated lighting and to allow

cameramen to work from almost any position. Western Electric sound equipment was installed and there were two show theatres. The studios had their own water supply and the largest electric power plant used at that time by a private company.

Two thousand people were employed in production and worked in the 14 self-contained cutting rooms, the machine shop, foundry, plumbing and blacksmiths' shops, the wood-working mill, shops for carpenters, plasterers, painters and electricians, stores for small props, stage equipment, make-up and property. The contractor was Dorman Long Ltd and Korda used Messrs Joseph as the firm of architects. There were even special arrangements with the Great Western Railway for a fast train service to Denham Station. No other studio in Britain had its own processing laboratories, one for negative developing, daily prints, master positives and duplicate negatives and a second for release prints. Technicolor laboratories were also established at Denham.

But there were drawbacks to this 'grand design', and when Pinewood was built and opened in September 1936, great heed was taken of alleged mistakes in the planning of Denham. The most serious problem was that the layout was much too spread out. The stores and workshops were so far from the stages that quick and easy transportation of property and equipment was impossible. The power-house, on the other hand, was too close to the stages and a constant source of noise and dirt for the art department situated just opposite. Dressing rooms and offices were linked to the stages by long, draughty corridors. Technicians found the sprawling layout particularly irritating. Charles Crichton, who was then working as a film editor at Denham, remembered: 'The cutting rooms were



I, Claudius: Merle Oberon, Charles Laughton, Emlyn Williams, Flora Robson.

one end and the theatres were about half a mile away . . . we used to have to go to the theatre on bicycles, otherwise we lost about an hour's work every day' (BBC2, 12 May 1983).

Korda told Caroline Lejeune in January 1936: 'Denham is a marvellous place. You will admire it far more than any of our pictures. But please remember, we have built it only now because we are ready for it now . . . For three years we have been collecting staff, getting them used to working together . . . From the minute we take over Denham, we shall be able to work at full pressure.' But unfortunately operating Denham proved to be more difficult than getting it started. In just over a year the Prudential was considering closing the studios and the wave of optimism that had accompanied the grand opening subsided. Britain was not Hollywood, and

Korda with H. G. Wells.



Korda did not possess the resources and markets available to America's movie moguls. Denham was operated inefficiently and London Films became embroiled in the general economic malaise that hit the film industry in 1937.

Korda temporarily abandoned his creative talents (the last film he directed while he controlled Denham was *Rembrandt* in 1936) to become a studio manager. But how far this role was forced upon him by adverse circumstances and how far he chose to act as Denham's administrative controller is not as clear-cut as many film historians have assumed. Paul Tabori argued that Korda was forced by the very size of Denham to concentrate too much energy on administration at the expense of 'what he liked most and did best'—film directing. This leaves one vital person out of the story: E. H. Lever, joint secretary of the Prudential, who struggled for five years to bring financial sanity to London Films. In exasperation Lever was driven to write in 1938: 'It is unfortunately true that on account of his temperament and his opportunism in financial matters Mr Korda is a dangerous element in any business, more particularly if he is in a position of control.'

In truth, there is nothing the Prudential would have liked more than for Korda to stick to film production rather than dabble in business. But whenever this was suggested, or his management skills criticised, Korda insisted on controlling the company. In May 1936 he threatened to resign when the Prudential begged him to work solely as a producer and abandon managing London Films. The Prudential's problem was that they had too much money invested in Korda's enterprises, so that his extravagant ways had, to some extent, to be tolerated.

Lever attempted to enforce a strict regime on the company but continually despaired of its perpetual indebtedness and serious mismanagement.

United Artists were fed up with Korda for two reasons: problems with his extravagant reign at Denham, and because, after *Henry VIII*, distributing British films in the States proved to be an uphill struggle. In many ways *Henry VIII* had been an exception. Released in 1933, at a time when the American production industry was recovering from the Depression and American exhibitors were unusually willing to show foreign films to offset the shortage of product, *Henry VIII*'s appealing qualities were aided and abetted by economic circumstances. As London Films' debts piled up and the Prudential was forced to lend the company more and more money, United Artists sympathised with Lever's pleas for Korda to see sense.

One United Artists' report on Korda's empire in the mid-1930s commented: 'He enters into huge commitments which they only learn gradually months afterwards and there is no choice but to implement them. If he breaks a contract he does not let them know about it until long afterwards, and the company has to wriggle out of those obligations as best it can . . . His mind is mixed up with various promoting and financial problems such as studios, printing, laboratories. Any ordinary person would be worried to death over that, but I do not think it is his nature to worry about the company's indebtedness . . . In his heart of hearts I think he curses everybody in connection with United Artists. Now and then if he has a favour to seek he seeks that favour with a particular person and blames everyone else. The one person who is never at fault is Korda himself!'

In May 1936, the month Denham was completed, London Films announced losses of £330,842 for the previous year and by the end of 1936 the company's accumulated debts had piled up to £1,794,222. It became all too clear that the ambitious production programme could not be completed within the original budget and that the Prudential would have to sanction further loans to keep the studio alive. At one meeting of London Films' executive committee, Korda admitted that his budget had been hopelessly exceeded. The minutes noted, 'Mr Lever expressed his concern that yet again an estimate put forward by the Company had been vitiated and, after full consideration, it was resolved that no further productions should be commenced after *Claudius* until July 1937.' *I, Claudius*, 'the epic that never was', was abandoned just one month after filming had begun. Merle Oberon's notorious car accident was the ostensible reason for halting the project, but Korda had overspent and the insurance money chipped-in by Lloyds meant that Korda recovered every penny of what he had already spent, conveniently allowing him to slide out of yet another over-commitment and for a time pacify the Prudential.

Lever tried to improve the management of London Films and Denham by insisting that a representative of the Prudential, Mr Brand, be present at Board meetings and supervise a scheme of retrenchment. Tenants were not easy to find and the Prudential had to choose between closing the studios and making no money or keeping them open by financing Korda's production programmes. Lever opted for the latter course, believing that as long as films were on the floor there was a chance that the Prudential's investment might one day pay off, especially if Korda came up with another *Henry VIII*. But there were limits as to how far the Prudential was prepared to tolerate Korda's mismanagement.

When their losses at Denham exceeded £1 million in the summer of 1938, Percy Crump, joint secretary of the Prudential, wrote a despairing memorandum: 'The fact that we have lost a great deal of money through our association with Korda must be faced . . . His engaging personality and charm of manner must be resisted. His financial sense is non-existent and his promises (even when they are sincere) worthless . . . Korda is a very dominant man and dangerous to converse with owing to his powers of persuasion . . . He has on several occasions obtained loans from London Films of about £3,000 each which so far as I know are still outstanding; this, notwithstanding his salary of £11,500 free of income tax and super tax . . . and the fact that we who have nursed his ventures have never received a penny out of them. One of these loans was made just about the time he presented Merle Oberon with a piece of jewellery estimated to cost the same amount.'

Similarly, United Artists continued to be disenchanted with Korda. Guedalla, their legal counsel in England, wrote in 1937: 'He talks grandiloquently about his being a stockholder, as well as a director, of United Artists . . . It is his own folly and the way he occupies his time that causes all his films to be so expensive. In the end they are made with undue rush. Also, I am sorry to say, owing to the way the whole studio is run, they are not made with that snappy perfection which characterises the great Hollywood films.'

Apart from the inefficient way Korda operated Denham, the studios were dragged down with the rest of the British film industry during the financial crisis of 1937, when the City withdrew its support from production and Korda courted outside tenants for Denham. A crazy system of financing films in the 1930s had had unfortunate results. Instead of expanding production and launching an assault on the American market, it simply gave birth to 'tinpot' film companies that overspent by thousands of pounds on unsuccessful and often uncompleted films. Ironically, the first film on the floor of Denham was *Southern Roses*—not a Korda production but by Max Schach.

Capitol Films, Schach's group, was largely financed by loans prized from normally reluctant banks because this time they were guaranteed against loss by insurance policies. For a time the banks remained blissfully ignorant of the losses. Loans were fairly easy to obtain on the security of the policies, but when the group produced a string of flops the insurance companies called a halt, finance for film production dried up and company after company went bust. So the famous 'crash' of 1937 robbed Denham of tenants since the independent units could not find money to finance their films. Thereafter the Prudential became extremely concerned about 'the studio problem', or keeping Denham open when tenants were thin on the ground and the only solution was to sponsor London Films' bold production plans.

Lever made a valiant attempt to persuade the Bank of England to rescue London Films and Denham. In 1937 the Bank was asked by the Government to investigate the film industry's chaotic financial affairs. Since London Films was the most important production company at that time, its plight became the focus of the enquiry. Lever even managed to enlist the support of Sir Kingsley Wood, Minister of Health, and Sir Joseph Ball, head of the Conservative Party's Research Department and a key figure in the National Publicity Bureau, created to lead the National Government's publicity campaign for the 1935 General Election. Ball sent memoranda on London Films and the film industry's troubles to Sir Kingsley Wood, who in turn urged the Board of Trade, the Government department responsible for film matters, to prevent a total collapse.

Interestingly, in his correspondence with the Bank of England Lever claimed that although London Films' manage-



Craftsman at Denham.

ment and finances had been in dire straits in 1935-36, the company was at last showing signs of improvement under a strict regime imposed by the Prudential. To some extent this was true. But by and large, as the Prudential's own records show, the story of 'improvement' was a ploy to convince the Bank that London Films was worth saving. The Prudential felt too committed to abandon the sinking ship.

The Bank's enquiry rejected the idea of a film finance organisation on the lines of the National Film Finance



Knight Without Armour: Donat and Dietrich in Korda's forest.

Corporation, established ten years later, and London Films was forced to court American money to pull Denham through the crisis. Korda's dream of making Denham the centre of British film-making had turned into a nightmare. Ironically, what saved the studio at the end of the 1930s was the expansion of American production in Britain to comply with the new double and triple quota regulations of the 1938 Films Act. This was a bitter pill for the patriotic Korda to swallow. *A Yank at Oxford*, *The Citadel* and *Goodbye, Mr Chips* were all made by MGM-British at Denham.

From the day it was opened until Korda relinquished control in 1939 to the Yorkshire grit of J. Arthur Rank, Denham had a chequered financial history but nevertheless did make over fifty feature films. A typical 'British' film made by Korda at Denham was *Knight Without Armour* (1937, cost £309,333, with receipts to September 1938 at £135,777), starring Robert Donat and Marlene Dietrich, who was paid £50,000 for her part. An 'international' production with minimal British input, the picture had a Belgian director, an American cameraman and supervising editor, a script by Hungarians and a story set in the Russian Revolution. The sets were like nothing seen before in a British studio, including the forest constructed inside one of Denham's largest sound stages. Sound recordist John Mitchell recalled: 'Everything appertaining to Korda was enormous and lavish... They brought in lorry loads of soil, matured trees were dug up and transplanted, hedges were planted and the sets stood long enough for bushes and trees and undergrowth to start growing' (BBC2, 12 May 1983).

Although he was criticised for employing foreign labour at the expense of British technicians, giving rise to the famous remark that there were as few

Brits employed at Denham as the number of Union Jacks at the front of the studio, Korda's Hollywood-style operations were vividly remembered by his British workers. Regular working hours were rare. One employee remembers working 53 hours at a stretch with no overtime pay. Yet there was little militancy at Denham. John Mitchell could only recall one dispute over the employment of a non-unionised plasterer's labourer when the workers refused to go into the front gate. 'Alex Korda was told... and he addressed them. He said "I am very disappointed to find that there is trouble... I've looked after you and all I will say is that if you are not back inside the studio by midday you will never ever work for me again." And he turned his back on them and walked back in and by midday they were back in the studio' (BBC2, 12 May 1983). Korda ran the studio in a paternalistic way and was apparently backed by a team of loyal workers, all in love with the idea that Denham could be 'Hollywood on the Colne'.

It is not difficult to sympathise with Lever's criticisms, particularly the notoriously long delays between starting and completing a production. Most of *Elephant Boy* (1937, costing £152,396 with receipts of £99,446 by September 1938) was shot at Denham because of problems when Robert Flaherty tried to direct the film on location in India. Charles Crichton remembered the abortive attempt to shoot the picture: 'After Flaherty left nothing seemed to happen, no rushes came back and the story is that they sent Flaherty frantic cables saying "When does shooting start?" and Flaherty was replying: "Shooting will start as soon as I have found elephant." Eventually a cable arrived saying, "Have found elephant, shooting starts immediately." Nothing happened. More cables. Another cable

back from Flaherty saying, "Shooting cannot start until I have found boy." Another cable saying, "Have found boy, shooting starts immediately." Nothing happened. Frantic cables. Cable from Flaherty: "Shooting delayed indefinitely. Elephant has unfortunately trod on boy." Shooting on location slowed up many productions, but the bulk of Korda's 'Empire pictures' were made in this way. *The Four Feathers* (1939) was filmed largely in the Sudan. Eighteen days passed before a camera was turned and the team camped at a site established for them by the East Surrey Regiment, at that time the garrison troops in Khartoum.

It is usually assumed that Korda allowed Denham to be built too big and that he realised he had made a grave mistake by building seven instead of three stages. But it is unlikely that he was somehow pressured into making lavish epics like *Elephant Boy* simply because of Denham's size. *Henry VIII*, by contemporary standards, was expensive, but by American standards it was an average 'A' feature. It was profitable and unfortunately encouraged Korda to become more grandiose, with disastrous results. Denham facilitated Korda's dream of making films on a vast scale. The British film industry's economic problems made these dreams unrealistic.

Other problems beset Denham in the 1930s. Cut-throat competition was introduced when Rank's Pinewood Studios opened in September 1936. It was an uphill struggle for the British film industry to support one new major studio, let alone two. In many ways Pinewood benefited from Denham's shortcomings. Charles Boot, a building contractor with a good track record and a member of Pinewood's board of directors, toured Hollywood before Pinewood was built, and on the whole the new studios were far more compact and centralised than Denham.

A classic case of overcapacity, Denham and Pinewood fiercely competed in the scramble for tenants, and during the 1937 crisis Richard Norton, as Rank's associate, decided that a production company, Pinebrook, should be formed to fill Pinewood. Pinewood also provided a home for resident production companies including British and Dominion, Herbert Wilcox, British National and British Paramount. The British studio scene had clearly developed dramatically since the 1920s. In 1939 there were 22 studios in Britain with 65 recording stages with a total floor area of 647,652 square feet. By comparison, Hollywood had 174 stages occupying 4,857,210 square feet.

In 1939 Denham passed to Rank. Korda left the Prudential to sort out the mess and Lever engineered the merger with Pinewood. The old regime gave way to more efficient organisation under the control of P. C. Stapleton, a former studio manager at British International Pictures. This happened not without some regret on the part of Korda's old

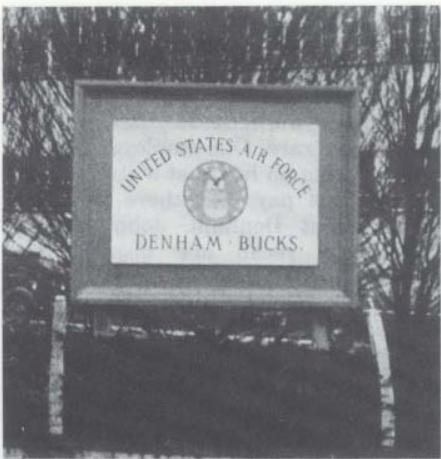
The derelict studio awaiting demolition. Photo: Paul de Burgh.



employees. Charles Crichton lamented the passing of Korda-esque days at Denham when retrenchment replaced extravagance: 'The awful day came when there were no pictures being made on the floor and we were seeing the last rushes... Alex turned to Stapleton and he said, "Well, now you've got your way, there are no pictures being made and we are wasting no money"' (BBC2, 12 May 1983).

In truth, Korda got off lightly, because no sooner had he lost Denham than the Prudential loaned him money to start his own production company, Alexander Korda Film Productions. The War saved the whole show at Denham, which went on to provide floor space for many important features. Korda directed *Perfect Strangers* (1945) there, but when he purchased a controlling interest in British Lion in 1946, Shepperton Studios, owned by British Lion, became his production base. Korda was involved in the production of many of the best British films, including *Anna Karenina* (1947), *The Third Man* (1949) and *Richard III* (1955), but Denham, the studio he created, was used by other producers.

Films were made at Denham until 1951, when Disney's *Robin Hood* ended its 15-year history as a major studio. After that the American Air Force leased the buildings for some time. More recently they have housed Rank Xerox equipment instead of actors, technicians, cameras and other trappings of the film



The studio in the 1950s.

business. Anvil Films leased part of the eastern end in 1966 and in 1979 rumours abounded that Rank Xerox was intent on demolishing the buildings. A campaign to save the studios, supported by Francis Coppola, who said he would 'love to take over' Denham because the studios would be 'a haven for filmmakers like Zoetrope in San Francisco', John Hann-Campbell, who worked for Anvil Films, and John Mills, could not prevent the British Land Company from redeveloping the site as offices and warehouses and demolishing the main buildings.

Korda's 'bricks and mortar' that had been greeted with such enthusiasm in 1936 could no longer be described as 'the

most modern studios in the world' and, unlike Pinewood and Elstree, did not become centres of technical excellence used by film-makers from all over the world. Korda's pride and joy had become Korda's folly. He did not choose the original site, the first colour film to be made there was produced by an American company and most of the films made at Denham were not Korda's work. Rank had always intended Pinewood to become the dominant partner in the uneasy merger of 1939, and after 1951 the two studios' fortunes could not have been more different.

London Films made a documentary soon after Denham was opened called *A Day at Denham*. It predicted that Denham Village would outlast the film complex that seemed so incongruous in rural England fourteen miles from London. After showing the marvels of the studios it concluded: 'And so we leave studios, cutting rooms, actors, cameramen and the rest of that bizarre world which makes pictures for your entertainment and return to Denham Village. It seems unbelievable that its placid calmness can remain so completely unruffled after the glimpses we've had of that gigantic enterprise so near and yet apparently so far away. Maybe the soul of Denham is chuckling contentedly to itself and murmuring, "Films may come and films may go, but I go on forever".' With hindsight, the documentary might well have said 'studios' instead of 'films'. ■

The last days of Denham.
Photo: Paul de Burgh.



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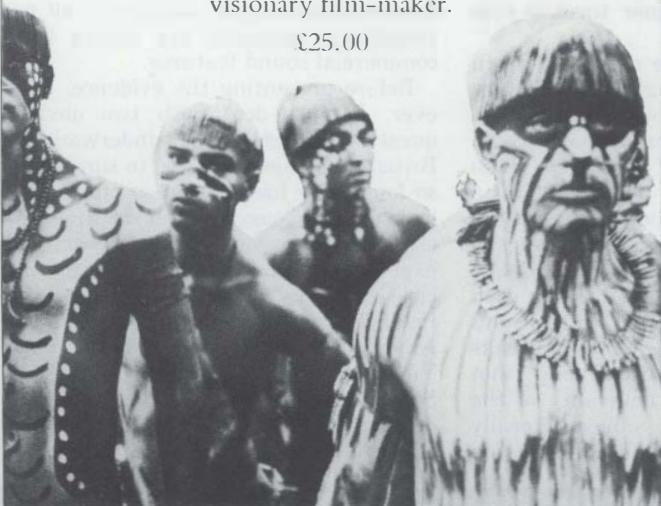
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A Walk on the

William Johnson
strolls through
the underworld of
British Cinema

'La passion du cinéma, sauf quelques cas isolés, n'existe guère en Angleterre.'

Alain Tanner (1958)

'The British cinema's diffidence, its punch-pulling, its polite avoidance of controversy have something in common with the national character. Passion and anger are rare . . .'

George Perry (1974)

Vigour, risk, excess, ruthlessness, obsession—these are not terms often used to characterise the British cinema. Except for rare mavericks such as Ken Russell and John Boorman, British filmmaking appears grounded in moderation, order, detachment. Most landmark British films are spoken of with respect rather than enthusiasm, as if they flirt with boredom rather than with danger. Even the new wave of film-makers who emerged in the 1960s kept many of the traits of the old guard. John Schlesinger's *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1972) has the same kind of detachment, craftsmanship, pacing and bittersweet ending as David Lean's *Brief Encounter* a quarter of a century earlier. When the film-makers of the 60s did try to break away from traditional moderation, like Desmond Davis in *Smashing Time*, the result could be both a literal and a figurative mess.

Yet a strong countercurrent runs through the British commercial cinema, sometimes shaking such pillars of control and detachment as Anthony Asquith and David Lean. If Lean achieved the apotheosis of middle-class values in *Brief Encounter*—propriety, emotion under restraint and the triumph of self-sacrifice (with careful doses of subclass comic relief from Stanley Holloway and Joyce Carey)—he had confronted more disturbing forces in *Great Expectations*. The arrival of Magwitch in Pip's London chambers carries a deeper shock than the celebrated confrontation in the graveyard, since it destroys Pip's romantic notion of Miss Havisham as his benefactress and Estelle as his intended. Pip's realisation that his good fortune depends on a convict is a painful pre-



Great Expectations: Magwitch (Finlay Currie) comes to Pip's London chambers.

Freudian equivalent of discovering the rude forces of the unconscious. Though all ends happily with Pip's brisk rescue of Estelle, it is his inner turmoil that lingers in the memory.

Such forces from the underworld can be found at work throughout the history of the British cinema, beginning at least as early as the Brighton pioneers. G. A. Smith's *The Miller and the Sweep* (1898) is a gem of surreal slapstick: as a windmill revolves hypnotically in the background, a miller carrying a bag of flour collides with a sweep carrying a bag of soot, and they proceed to beat each other black and white. J. Williamson's *The Big Swallow* (1901) not only breaks away from the theatrical long shot but also shatters the neutrality of the camera eye, since its subject literally swallows both camera and operator and

retires smacking his lips. In contemplating short films and silents, however, it's easy to find more significance than they can reasonably bear; that's why all my remaining examples are drawn from commercial sound features.

Before presenting the evidence, however, I must deal with two obvious questions. First, if an underworld of British films has managed to survive for so long, why has it been so often overlooked? One easy answer is that few critics looked for it and fewer still expected to find it. For a long time classiness was viewed as an asset, particularly in film-makers aiming at the American market. Henry VIII, Queen Victoria, Shakespeare, Dickens and Sadler's Wells had to form the vanguard of Britain's overseas ventures. Meanwhile, the recurrent economic crises of

Wild Side

the British film industry fostered caution, or worse, in many other productions. Any film historian focusing on those crises would hardly expect to find consistent risk-taking amid the displays of timidity.

Second question: How can a list of scattered counter-examples prove the existence of a countercurrent? It's true that the underworld of British cinema has no single, easily identifiable attribute that would demonstrate its continuity. I have had to use a variety of terms merely to introduce it. However, there are four threads of similarity that wind through my examples, sometimes singly, sometimes with two or more intertwined. Several films are the work of first-time directors, who presumably had not yet adapted to the 'norm'. Other examples involve casting against type, a break with familiarity that could affect the whole tone of a film. Still others are genre films whose makers had little hope (or intention) of attaining classiness and were therefore under less pressure to avoid risks. And some films were forced into wildness—like parts of *Great Expectations*—by scripts overrich in incident. Thus the scriptwriters include a few names, such as T. E. B. Clarke and Muriel and Sydney Box, best known for more conventional work.

Just as significant is what the examples do *not* have in common. They cover almost the whole spectrum of themes, styles and budgets. Their casts range from tiny to huge, their settings from cramped to exotic, their moods from grim to ebullient. This variety also helps to explain why the wild films are generally overlooked or underestimated. Most surveys of the British cinema divide it into categories based on theme, style and mood—and in each category the wild films form a minority. But in each category wildness is there.

It is there even in a Depression-era entertainment like Victor Saville's *Friday the Thirteenth* (1933), which takes only one risk: it bulges with so much incident as to seem in continual danger of flying apart. An omnibus film—literally—it interweaves eight separate stories involving passengers on a London bus that crashes. The characters range from Max Miller as an unscrupulous junk dealer to Emlyn Williams as a smiling blackmailer to Ralph Richardson as a schoolmaster engaged to dancer Jessie Matthews, and their assorted activities include not only blackmail but also theft, swindling,

adultery, suspicion and deceit. All ends more or less happily, however (Miller even gets away with his swindle), and I cannot pretend that the film offers much more than a sense of exhilaration. But that is an excellent start.

In retrospect, it's possible to see the beginnings of Michael Powell's idiosyncrasies in several of the quota quickies he made in the 1930s. *Crown vs Stevens* (1936) gives a strong foretaste of the penchant for disturbing cross-currents that would culminate in *Peeping Tom* (1960). Beatrix Thomson as the wife of a stingy businessman kills a pawnbroker in the course of a theft, and later tries to kill her husband. When arrested, instead of showing remorse or shame, she sings out, 'See you all in court!' The film confounds audience sympathies even more by presenting events from the viewpoint of Patric Knowles as one of the husband's young employees, a continual victim of the victim's stinginess.

The first of Pen Tennyson's three films, *There Ain't No Justice* (1939), is remarkable for its absence of middle-class characters. No judge, minister, schoolteacher or other authority figure ever drops in with advice or admonishment: the working-class characters tackle their problems in their own way, thank you. And unlike the films of Gracie Fields or George Formby, *There Ain't No Justice* offers no (figurative) song and dance about the virtues of the working class. Jimmy Hanley, a cheerful and impulsive mechanic with a flair for boxing, is taken up by seedy fight promoter Edward Chapman, who uses a flashy woman to try to keep him under control. The film moves briskly to a happy ending, but its cumulative effect is one of tartness and vigour.

Friday the Thirteenth: Emlyn Williams, Robertson Hare, Jessie Matthews.



Another 1939 film, Arthur Woods' *They Drive by Night*, also unfolds on the margin of 'respectable' society, and its chief middle-class character is the villain. The hero is Emlyn Williams, an ex-con pursued for a murder he didn't commit. The action becomes overcomplex and messy, but the film is memorable for Ernest Thesiger's portrayal of a sex killer—even more suave and self-confident than Williams had been as the blackmailer in *Friday the Thirteenth*. In another thriller that Woods made the same year, *The Nursemaid Who Disappeared*, there's a vivid scene of a man being clubbed from a tube platform in front of an approaching train—foreshadowing a similar episode in the New York City subway in *The Mad Doctor* (1941; released in Britain as *A Date with Destiny*) by Tim Whelan, Woods' codirector on *Q Planes* (also 1939).

The wild vein in British cinema does not, however, manifest itself only in details. In *Dead of Night* (1945, scripted by T. E. B. Clarke) any unevenness in the individual episodes is more than redeemed by the overall design, with its ending that reinstates an atmosphere of dread as it loops back to the beginning. Fred Hoyle has credited the film with giving him the idea of continuous creation, and although evidence now supports the Big Bang theory as far as the physical universe is concerned, *Dead of Night* remains impressive not only for its Big Bangs but also, and above all, for its creative continuity.

The unease of *Dead of Night* is echoed in subsequent films by two of its directors. It intrudes even on the comfortable thrills of Charles Crichton's *Hue and Cry* (1946), in which Jack Warner—not yet the incarnation of the lovable bobby—plays a ruthless villain who is quite prepared to kill the schoolboy heroes.

Robert Hamer, who made his directorial debut with the haunted mirror episode of *Dead of Night*, is justly praised for *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), which treats sex, murder and greed with the debonair detachment of a classy drawing-room comedy. Equally impressive, though worlds apart in tone and

A Walk on the Wild Side

setting, is Hamer's *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), an intense and often biting study of postwar hopes and disillusionments. Like *Friday the Thirteenth*, it teems with characters and incident, but it manages to steer a course between the virtuous plot manipulation of the earlier film and the shapelessness of excessive realism. Edward Chapman, the unscrupulous promoter of the prewar *There Ain't No Justice*, has subsided into a respectable working man trying to cope with two restive daughters who hate their stepmother (Googie Withers) and a wife whose past love for a handsome crook (John McCallum) is reawakened when he escapes from Dartmoor and hides out in their house. At the same time Jimmy Hanley has evolved from the perennial optimist of *There Ain't No Justice* to an embittered hoodlum, and Jack Warner has moved to the side of law and order without acquiring any lovability. Superficially, the film ends on a reassuring note: Warner captures both McCallum and Hanley, and Chapman stands by Withers. Yet anger and desperation have been made so real—that the viewer is likely to feel *There Ain't Much Justice* in the ending.

Michael Powell (now teamed with Emeric Pressburger) brought his offbeat talents to many major productions in the 1940s; but, as with Hamer, the success of a classy film (*The Red Shoes*) tended to overshadow the rest. Although *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* is in some respects a typical war film, its bomber crew avoid the class hierarchy that separates bridge from below decks in *In Which We Serve*, and they are even allowed to recognise the enemy as human: a sergeant (Bernard Miles) exchanges reminiscences with the pilot (Hugh Burden) about former German girlfriends. The beginning and ending of the film, with quick-cut scenes and tongue-in-cheek titles, prefigure Godard, while the escape from Holland by boat along an underground canal anticipates the eerie atmosphere of the afterlife in Cocteau's *Orphée*. As Powell has quipped, 'I try to keep ten years ahead of the opposition.'

Black Narcissus (1947) suffers from excessive exoticism, but there's a disturbing performance by Kathleen Byron

as a psychotic nun obsessed with trader David Farrar. In *The Small Back Room* (1949), adapted from Nigel Balchin's novel about World War II boffins and the disarming of a new German booby trap, it's Farrar who's disturbed, while Byron radiates strength and independence as his lover. Powell's wildness reveals itself not only in Farrar's alcoholic hallucinations of mammoth whisky bottles and clocks but also in the savage attempt by Michael Gough, as Farrar's military colleague, to wrest information about the booby trap from a dying victim.

The most breathtaking of the Powell and Pressburger films of the 40s is *A Canterbury Tale*. Its action hinges on Eric Portman as a respectable bachelor who slips out at night to pour glue on young women's hair: his motive is to discourage women from going out with soldiers stationed in the area, thus inducing the latter to attend his lectures on local history. With or without its Freudian implications, this would be an extraordinary idea even for a villain, yet the hair-gluer is presented not just with sympathy (like the sex killer in *Peeping Tom*) but as if rather normal. With this attitude towards a character who, if depicted at all in other films, would have been branded as a pervert, Powell was more than ten years ahead of his time. So he was in the film's opening, where a falconer in Chaucer's era flies a hawk that becomes a World War II Spitfire—an aerial time leap that predates the bone-to-spacecraft transformation in 2001 by a quarter of a century.

If the 'normal' Portman of *A Canterbury Tale* still makes us feel uneasy, it was a change from the chilliness of his more characteristic roles (such as the Nazi u-boat captain in *49th Parallel*). He had an even greater change, playing warm romantic scenes, toward the beginning of Compton Bennett's *Daybreak* (1949). Bennett and scriptwriters Muriel and Sydney Box are best known for the pop psychology of *The Seventh Veil* (1945), but the wild and jarring plot of *Daybreak* taps deeper springs of human behaviour. Portman is a loner, a barber who works on the side as the public hangman. He falls in love with and marries a young woman (Ann Todd), but is ashamed to reveal his sideline, telling her that his visits to various jails are

business trips. They live on a houseboat in the Thames estuary, with a Danish sailor (Maxwell Reed) as a handyman. Portman returns early from one 'trip' to find the handyman making a play for Todd; they fight, and Portman is knocked overboard. He is presumed dead, Todd commits suicide, Reed is sentenced to death for murder—and Portman arrives at his cell to hang him! But Portman cannot go through with his revenge, and kills himself instead. Despite its surfeit of melodrama, the film has an undercurrent of genuine tragedy: because Portman cannot change his secretive nature, it destroys first the openness of his love for Todd and then their lives.

While *Daybreak*, with its setting closer to Surrey Docks than to Surrey, disqualified itself from the classiness stakes, it had too much gloom and too little action to win popularity. Other British films avoided both classiness and unpopularity by resorting to the unrespectable genres of crime, horror and science fiction—sometimes with memorable results.

My Brother's Keeper (1949), one of only two films directed by editor Alfred Roome (in collaboration with Roy Rich), gave Jack Warner his last fling as a criminal before *The Blue Lamp* launched him on a permanent career with the police. Taken into custody, he goes on the run—forcing George Cole, to whom he is handcuffed, to run with him. Tracked down after various displays of brisk ruthlessness, Warner unsuccessfully tries to escape through a minefield. As the mine explodes, the police officer in charge of the pursuit makes a brief grimace of exasperation. In this taut film, there is no lovability on either side of the law.

The first film of another film editor, *Nowhere to Go* (Seth Holt, 1958), centres on a con man (American George Nader) whose inability to trust anyone leads to his ruin. Maggie Smith plays the woman whom Nader mistakenly distrusts, but the most vivid performance comes from Bernard Lee as the fellow crook who double-crosses him. Lee had made his mark as the lovable sergeant in *The Third Man* and would later become a fixture as James Bond's boss, but here he plays in a sharp, sardonic key. Avoiding both the showiness and the uncertainty

Beatrix Thomson in Michael Powell's *Crown vs Stevens*.



There Ain't No Justice: Jimmy Hanley as the young boxer.



of many directorial debuts, *Nowhere to Go* unfolds with tense authority.

Offbeat (Cliff Owen, 1960) has the more usual weaknesses of a low-budget genre film, with camera set-ups often changed to compensate for limited sets and rehearsal time; but it also has a strong script and enough energy to bring it to life. An undercover cop (William Sylvester) joins a gang of burglars to ensure that they will be arrested during their next heist, but feels increasing solidarity with them. The drama emerges tensely enough to suggest kinship with more distinguished films such as Raoul Walsh's *White Heat* and Jacques Becker's *Le Trou*. Moreover, the pieties of law and order are observed only briefly, at the end.

A more polished but wilder film made earlier the same year was *Never Let Go* (John Guillermin, 1960). Guillermin is one of several British directors who rode to the us on little more than technical proficiency (he did the remake of *King Kong*), but in *Never Let Go* his coldness lends power to what could have been a conventional David and Goliath story. The ostensible hero is a struggling salesman, Richard Todd, whose car is stolen by a gang masterminded by Peter Sellers. Both Todd and Sellers play against the grain: the usually complacent Todd becomes hysterical in his attempt to recover the instrument of his livelihood, while Sellers abandons his comedy quirks for sneering villainy. Despite an implausible showdown from which Todd emerges the victor, the film is memorable for its icy depiction of a middle-class man at bay.

Even Basil Dearden, director of *The Blue Lamp* and expert at bringing problem films to safe conclusions (*Frieda*, *Violent Playground*, *Victim*, etc), could reveal a streak of sardonic vigour in the crime film *Woman of Straw* (1964). Its three leads are all cast against type: Sean Connery and Gina Lollobrigida make a pair of uneasy swindlers, while Ralph Richardson plays a wealthy bully who becomes a supposedly still living corpse.

Stephen Frears has used elements of the crime genre to throw a surreal light on characters in conflict. In his television film *Bloody Kids* (1980), two bored schoolboys start a chain reaction of

mischief that transforms Westcliff-on-Sea into a Californian vision of hell. In *The Hit* (1984), Frears borrowed Buñuel's Spanish sunlight to illuminate a wry fable of three men journeying through and to violent death. If the relation between Terence Stamp (the calm victim who crumbles into fear at the crucial moment) and John Hurt (the hot man who starts to lose his grip but dies with a wink) seems too schematic, it's enriched by the smart mindlessness of Tim Roth as Hurt's apprentice, an older Bloody Kid.

Although surreal settings and alienated characters are among the potential strengths of the science fiction/horror film, most film-makers who turn to this genre (and not only in Britain) find it too easy to prosper with a minimum of wild imagination. Britain has its share of exceptions. In *Unearthly Stranger* (John Krish, 1963), John Neville comes to realise that his wife is an alien creature in disguise, and that aliens are trying to take over Earth by impersonating women. The ambiguity of the film's attitude—is it misogynistic or is it dissecting male paranoia?—makes it all the more disturbing. In *The Night Caller* (John Gilling, 1965), women are the victims of an alien—disguised as a human male—who is trying to get back to 'his' home planet. What's disturbing here is the alien's view of humans as mere means to an end, with none of the sentimental empathy found in alien films from *It Came from Outer Space* to *E.T.* and none of the hostility that makes for a conventional showdown in *The Thing* or *Alien*.

The wildest of all British SF films is the third in the Quatermass series, *Quatermass and the Pit* (Roy Baker, 1967), whose plot peels off revelation after revelation involving alien invaders, mind control, mysterious forces, telekinesis and the origins of religious myths. There is indeed a showdown—splendidly apocalyptic—but it follows a whirlwind crescendo of events that reverberate in the viewer's memory.

As further evidence that the wild streak in British cinema is no accident, consider two groups of films that have so far been passed over. First, there are those made in Britain by foreign directors, many of whom have shown at least

as much wildness here as in their native or other lands. Well-known examples include Joseph Losey's *Time Without Pity*, Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* and *Cul-de-Sac*, and Stanley Kubrick's *2001*. Less familiar is *The Purple Plain* (1954), adapted by Eric Ambler from the H. E. Bates novel. An iridescent tale of war, despair and love, with an eerie soundtrack of insect twitterings, pen scratchings and hallucinatory explosions, this is Robert Parrish's finest film.

Second, British wildness bursts forth not only from the good films but also from the bad. Though it's often hard to distinguish intrepid dottiness from miscalculated melodrama, there are some clinkers that impose a certain respect on the viewer's derision. As many better films fade in my memory, I cannot forget *Daughter of Darkness* (Lance Comfort, 1948), in which Siobhan McKenna plays a nymphomaniac organist who strangles her men, or *The Glass Mountain* (Henry Cass, 1949), in which Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray, the Lunts of Surbiton, confront the aggressive emotions of Valentina Cortese and Tito Gobbi. (See Denison try to look like an officer and a gentleman while Cortese entwines herself passionately around him; hear him exclaim, when summoned by Gray from the piano to the lunch table, 'Lamb chops! Darling, you're the perfect wife for a composer.') A more recent film in the same tradition is *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973), about Hebridean islanders who prosper thanks to such pagan rites as human sacrifice.

The bad films have more in common with the good than their intensity. Topics that are generally considered unBritish, unfilmic or both—such as religion, sex, music, food and paranoia—flourish throughout the wild underworld of British films. Even the good films may be criticised for lacking taste, balance, decency and that indispensable British resource, a sense of humour. Not surprisingly, only one of my major examples (*Dead of Night*) is included in Jerry Vermilye's book *The Great British Films*. Undoubtedly the thin line between the good and the bad in the filmic underworld provides yet another reason why the former have yet to be recognised as an integral part of British cinema. ■

Hue and Cry: Jack Warner cast against type and against the law.



The Glass Mountain: Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray.



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Derek Jarman's CARAVAGGIO

David Robinson of *The Times* has said of *Caravaggio*, Derek Jarman's long-awaited film (a BFI production), 'it is the ultimate demonstration of the essential lesson of all Jarman's film work: that screen spectacle is the product of an artist's eye and imagination rather than megabuck budgets. Every frame of the film is composed with a painter's skill; again and again it takes the breath with a seemingly accidental composition or effect of light.'

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UMBERTO ECO: Today I go much less often to the cinema. The thirst I used to have for at least two films a day has gone. This has happened slowly over the last twenty years. Or it may be because nowadays I usually wait a few years before taking in a new book or a new film. I used to have a friend who every morning read a fresh, six-month-old newspaper. That's what I do with films and books. My friend may have missed a few important events . . . but with films and books, I believe it important not to judge them in the light of the reviews or on the basis of fashion.

I also react slowly. I never know immediately after a screening whether I liked the film; sometimes it takes months. After seeing *L'Aventura*, for example, it was only when I was retelling the film to someone that I noticed how beautiful it was. After all, I come from Piedmont, the land of the slow and somewhat stubborn Italian Northerners, and I need time to express myself. That's why I find it hard to have an opinion about today's cinema.

I can't even say very much, this early, about the film being made from my book *The Name of the Rose*. I don't keep up with all the technical preparations, nor do I think an author should become too involved in the preparation of a screenplay based on one of his works, especially when, as in this case, the original is a 550-page book, which to work as a film must be shortened. It's like a surgeon whose son needs an operation: usually he has a colleague to do the job. His hands could tremble . . .

For the past three years, the director Jean-Jacques Annaud and I have met every two or three months—he comes to Italy or I go to Paris—we go out to eat, talk incessantly, but never about technical things, rather about his ideas. I prefer to see the film slowly making its own way. For example, of the fourteen versions of the screenplay, I have read only two. These were, I think, the twelfth and thirteenth. But even then I only made a few indirect comments. I said once that I felt the way the director was transcribing a scene slightly falsified the intentions. Annaud explained, however, that the big field battle I envisaged would increase the cost of the film by a thousand million lire. What could I say? Should I have offered to pay this myself?

We intend to shoot a lot of the film in the studio, in Rome, and on location in the Abruzzi mountains and in two German monasteries, Maulbronn and Eberbach. Hermann Hesse studied theology in one of these—I don't remember which. Jean-Jacques Annaud journeyed all the way from Portugal to Southern Italy to find sites for the film and collect photographs of Romanesque-Gothic ecclesiastical architecture. Then he came to my house in the country with this incredible exhibition and, of course, it turned out that most of the places were either too restored or too decrepit. And then there was the problem of cover sets: if it should decide to rain somewhere for

The Name of the Rose, the philosopher Umberto Eco's many-layered medieval murder mystery set in a remote monastery in Northern Italy, is currently before the cameras in West Germany. The producer is Bernd Eichinger, of Neue Constantin, and the director Jean-Jacques Annaud (*Black and White in Colour, Quest for Fire*), who wrote the screenplay in collaboration with Gérard Brach and Andrew Birkin. The film, budgeted at \$18.3m, stars Sean Connery as William of Baskerville, the investigating monk, F. Murray Abraham as the Inquisitor and Michael Lonsdale as the Abbot. Umberto Eco talked to GIDEON BACHMANN about the background to the film at last summer's Locarno festival.

The Name of the Rose

Umberto Eco. Photo: Deborah Beer.



two weeks, we needed locations nearby in a protected space to keep the expensive crews busy.

I imagined the Rocca di San Leo as a major exterior and Annaud went there again and again to study and photograph it in all kinds of light: in November with an early morning fog, in summer at sunset. The exterior views are magnificent, but inside it's much too restored and there is nowhere nearby that one could shoot in bad weather. We began to realise that it would be cheaper to shoot in a studio. Actually, I believe the period can be better represented by reproduction. Take church doorways: these used to be painted, but today they are colourless and covered with the patina of time; which makes it all very romantic, but doesn't reproduce the feeling of the epoch. In the year 1000, there was a famous saying: 'Europe is being covered by a white mantle of churches.' Today these have become grey churches. Authenticity may be more readily achieved by faking.

It all took a long time, added to which Annaud made philological demands. He wanted to reproduce the period in all its details. One of my colleagues had formed a committee of medieval researchers, but Annaud managed to shame even some of these fellows with details they knew nothing about. There is a school in France which undertakes historical research in the detail of the everyday, the realm of material life. My film is a great challenge for these researchers. It is one thing to say, 'They ate off wooden plates,' but when a film-maker wants to know the exact dimension of those plates . . . Or, 'They prayed with their foreheads on the floor,' but what did they do with their backsides? Did they stick them in the air or press them into their heels? No historical text and no painting answers these questions.

Did the Franciscans in those days wear beards? In Giotto there are bearded ones and beardless ones. Nobody could give us an answer. Then we ourselves found a 14th century document which said the Franciscans had to shave at least once every two months. The Benedictines, on the other hand, had to shave every week. So statistically that meant we were more likely to find a bearded Franciscan and a clean-shaven Benedictine. And what about the colour of the monks' habits?

Annaud was amazingly painstaking in his search for faces. For the main character, he shot tests with more than forty actors, each lasting for about an hour. He wanted to see how the eyes of the actors reacted to a glass of whisky, how they looked after eating. He brought in many actors whose work he had seen, only to tell me why in the end he didn't like them. He rarely liked their eyes, the expression of their eyes in various circumstances. That is why all this took three years and why I have kept my distance. Anyway, what would there be left for me to see in the finished film if I followed it all now?

I am not sure about going on the set. On a Bertolucci set there are always



Sean Connery (William of Baskerville) with Jean-Jacques Annaud.

beautiful women. But here? What can I do with eighty monks? Furthermore, I don't want to interfere because I know Annaud is being extremely faithful to the book, not only in the decor and the faces, but also in the psychology of the characters. He wanted actors whose nationality corresponded to that of the people in the book. When he found a French saddle-maker he liked, he asked me if it was all right for him to be French, which he is not in the book—though, mind you, he did come from a village near the French border, which in any case made very little difference in those days. Obviously, he is having to give up his extreme fidelity to the book. He can only sustain it on a psychological level.

I don't believe an author can easily say

F. Murray Abraham (Bernardo Gui).



'Yes' or 'No' when he sees a screenplay based on his work. After all, a screenplay is only a screenplay, and when a director of photography during shooting places a light in such a way that it changes the impact of a scene, a Hitchcock can become a Fellini or a Fellini can become a mattress . . . it all depends on how the director works with the faces of the actors during shooting.

Annaud and I talked a lot about the psychology of the characters, but it isn't always easy to express on film things described on the page, things a reader would automatically understand. Take the scene where the young woman is to be burned. In the book, the young monk doesn't seem to pay much attention to this, even though he has been to bed with her. Now a reader can understand why a young monk from an aristocratic family, to whom the idea of a contact of the flesh was in any case totally unusual, would do nothing more. But in a film? Here the viewer misses the element of identification.

So I suggested a scene—this was my only addition to what is in the book—in which these two young people make one more attempt to speak to each other. He talks to her in Latin and she answers in the local dialect as spoken at that time (which philologists in the audience will surely identify at once), and it becomes immediately apparent that there can be no real contact between them. The linguistic difference testifies to the divergence of their worlds. They come from different universes. Just as writing and film-making may be two differing universes . . .

I have never thought of directing a film; but, I should add, until two days before starting *The Name of the Rose*, I had never thought of writing a novel. Maybe when I'm eighty years old I will

direct a film . . . though I know quite well this will never happen. Which is not to say that I don't have some experience. I worked for television in Milan from 1954 to 59. I was an employee, but I followed the directors on set and on location. Even that far back, I understood that this was no profession for me: I am much too impatient. I hate dead time.

The prospect of being on location at two in the afternoon and having to wait until eight in the evening because some black raven is needed but they have sent a grey one, drives me up the wall. I would change the film, make the raven into a lion, if one were just passing . . . For the same reason, I find fishing soothing to the soul—when I think about it—but if I had to sit there for hours, I think I'd start dynamiting the fish. When I write, I make my own rhythm with paper and typewriter, but I don't think directing films, or even plays, would attract me.

On the other hand, I do believe that my writing is fairly visual, even when I deal with abstract concepts. All my essays are full of drawings. My memories are all visual on an associative level. For example, I remember a particular philosophical concept because I was always drawing dinosaurs in the class in which we were studying it. Even today I draw a lot of dinosaurs. My novel started with a year simply making drawings. And when I teach, I can't get along without a blackboard. I have to draw, if only a

straight line. My students may not know what that line stands for, but for me it is essential. Even for a philosopher, pure intuition precedes the application of the whole categorical apparatus. A visual orientation towards the world always precedes verbal synthesis. It does not matter whether the visuals are actually there or exist only in the imagination: they define, in either case, the intuition of which they are born.

Even the absence of a visual or aural element can be a form of visual or aural stimulus. This has to do with expectation and how we fulfil it. There are things which we expect a film, a novel or a poem to make visible. If they are not conjured up for us, we miss them. But we all know authors who can make us see things without actually showing them, perhaps in a stronger way than those authors who do show them. Take an example from Manzoni: the way he presents the nun of Monza. He said, 'I don't want to talk of love, there is too much of it in the world,' and in a way, for ideological and religious reasons, he didn't, openly. But in the end, what he tells is a story upon which someone like Diderot, or a contemporary film director, not to speak of the Marquis de Sade, could have built a highly exciting and itchingly sensational action. Endless stories of sex and perversion are condensed by Manzoni in the oft-quoted phrase: 'The unfortunate girl replied . . .' The reader understands everything, he supplies his own images. That is Manzoni's capacity for telling an

immense story by saying practically nothing.

Now take the cinema, let's say John Ford. That is his strength too: to tell an immense story without showing it unfold. Of course, there is nothing more exciting than seeing John Wayne fall to the ground in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* and then, one after the other, take out his adversaries. But with Ford you don't actually see things like that. All you get is a long wait in a bar, a lot of peripheral scenes. The duel is much more tense and dramatic for not being seen. These are the capabilities of silence, and Ford's innovation was to introduce silence as a way of dealing with a scene like the Western duel which had already become a film cliché.

It is not a golden rule, of course, that to tell a story in the best possible way you have to keep silent about it. There are extremes in both directions. The Battle of Waterloo, as told by Stendhal, is practically all withheld, except for a few unconnected views of Fabrizio del Dongo. But Waterloo, as told by Hugo in *Les Misérables*, is all there in detail, as if a camera were filming from a helicopter. Both these battles are beautiful; Hugo talks too much and Stendhal too little. Some things are probably better talked about and others kept silent about, but it is clear that silence is as much an aesthetic tool as its opposite. And a very efficient one at that. ■

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Revolution: Al Pacino (Tom Dobb) and Dexter Fletcher (his son).

The promissory note

Revolution/John Pym

In *Reds*, the inspirational story of John Reed and the Russian Revolution, there was Lenin craning forward, exhorting the people; and in *Danton*, a somewhat less inspirational portrait of another idealist and another revolution, there was unforgiving Robespierre behaving as every schoolboy would expect him to behave. In Hugh Hudson's *Revolution* (Columbia-EMI-Warner), there is no Cornwallis; Valley Forge is under mud not snow; the signatories of the Declaration of Independence are absent; and even General Washington, in the unlikely person of Frank Windsor, has so little to do that one reviewer at least only caught up with him when the credits rolled.

Robert Dillon, who scripted *French Connection II*, has written an American account of the War of Independence which has no use for classical tableaux vivants. True, the picture begins with a traditional title—New York City, 1776: fifteen thousand Redcoats are poised to retake the city from a few thousand ill-equipped men of the Continental Army—and along the way bits and pieces of history (names mostly) are thrown in. But on the whole, it's assumed that the audience knows roughly what happened and what the outcome was, and if they don't then this is not the place for a history lesson (sound reasoning). This is defiantly not an epic of the *Longest Day* school, with a star for every name officer. Instead the glass is turned on one man, an illiterate Scots trapper named Tom Dobb (Al Pacino), over whom the wave of revolution breaks.

Revolution is not patriotic filmmaking in the manner of *Chariots of Fire* (although it does bang the drum for America), nor is it yarning on the scale

of *Greystoke* (although its canvas is as broad). It dares more than Hugh Hudson's earlier features, although it's as guileless as both of them and as unambiguous as his famous series of TV commercials, the spilt glass of Cinzano. Its subject is a swooning romantic tale, the birth of the American Dream, and it is presented with a dreamlike intensity of purpose. As in a dream, reality is heightened, time concertinaed; those we fear become more terrifying and those we love more deeply desired. (The dreamer is Tom Dobb, who remains himself, which is to say Al Pacino remains Al Pacino, nasal New York burr and all.) In dreams—and revolutions—the tendency is to perceive individuals as caricatures: there's no time for assimilation.

The danger of parading caricatures on screen, of course, is that they are mistaken for the real thing; and *Revolution* has been unjustly hammered on both sides of the Atlantic for this very reason. Here, every man's deliberately in his humour. A braying, flour-faced British officer, who has enjoyed a human fox hunt, is nothing but indifferent cruelty. The black servants are slavery itself—though nowadays in the cinema a quiet, handsome dignity has replaced the sort of talkative bustle Butterfly McQueen made famous.

Tom's antagonist, Sergeant Major Peasy (Donald Sutherland), is undiluted evil (and perhaps if you had been stalked across moorland by this towering creature with an immense spear, you would regard him thus). He takes cold delight in battle and perverse satisfaction in whipping drummer boys. He pimps for an obese superior. A sign of his character is the diseased mole on his

cheek. Privileged Daisy McConnahay (Nastassja Kinski) is the soul of rebellious, youthful idealism. Coming upon the wounded Tom, the man destiny has picked for her, stretched exhausted in a field of golden rape seed, she presses herself to him. It is as if she is willing their identities to merge.

Daisy's mother (Joan Plowright), a busy, abstracted woman who has long since forgotten why she is forever crying out orders, is marked by a one-note silliness. A token of her character (which is not without charm) is the precarious, regal wig she wears to entertain the victors after the recapture of New York. The list of these caricatures is long: the Liberty Girl with the patriotic tattoo on her forehead; the good Indian who scalps the bad Indian; McConnahay, the provisions man, who shamelessly blows with the wind and lies to his daughter. Diverting though they are, these characters are not, however, the kernel of the movie.

Nor, really, is the plot: a schematic affair tracing Tom's conversion to the revolutionary cause and his final grudging acceptance that, while it can reunite him with Daisy, it cannot immediately redeem all its promises. *Revolution*'s intention, and it succeeds, is to create a mood: of fevered confusion and feverish excitement; of slow, cumbersome battles in which there were no helicopters to whisk away the wounded; and in particular of an individual's loneliness and fear when the wave knocks him down. Hudson and his team (costume designer John Mollo, production designer Assheton Gorton, photographer Bernard Lutic) not only conjure this but sustain it. The battles are impressively orchestrated; King's Lynn becomes a grubby, creaky, authentic New York waterfront; the actors are comfortable in their clothes; the camera (frequently handheld) moves with sinuous excitement, both the close-up and long moving shots are used with unaccustomed effectiveness.

How one takes this mood (which is in fact the substance of the movie) largely depends on how one takes to Al Pacino. Tom Dobb, at first woebegone, baffled and half a coward, finds something of himself in the course of the plot: most significantly, during the Battle of Yorktown, he finds that he has purged the need for personal revenge on the man who tortured his son. In him the hopes of the Revolution are concentrated. A widower who has lost all but one of his children, America has given him another chance. He may not, perhaps, fulfil his potential; though he has the consolation of a life with Miss Kinski, the Spirit of '76. But his son, despatched into the wilderness with his pregnant wife and all his father's money, almost certainly will. Or so the story goes. This is the nub, and Tom Dobb alone must make you believe it.

Al Pacino pulls out the Method stops.

He encapsulates a universal inarticulate articulacy, and when, in the film's central speech, he explains in a jumbled blur to his wounded son just what the Revolution means to him and what his life was like before it, he demonstrates—for my money, at least—how an actor can pull a film together and compel its wayward parts to fall into place. By an effort of will, more than anything, he touches the heart.

At the beginning of *Revolution*, Tom Dobb reluctantly accepts a promissory note for his commandeered boat. When at the end he comes to redeem it he is informed that the land due to him in interest has been sold to pay the revolutionary debt. Hugh Hudson, his producer Irwin Winkler and his backers Goldcrest have delivered a sound vessel to the public. The note should, if there's justice, be redeemed in part if not in full. □

Crime and Punishment

Ran/Tom Milne

At 75, whether or not speculation is correct that a coincidence of ages between the film-maker and his King Lear betokens an element of testamentary soul-searching, Kurosawa directs *Ran* (Virgin) with the easy grace that comes of a lifetime's experience. At first glance, as with the work of other old masters—films like *Gertrud*, *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir*, *Seven Women*—a certain classicism seems to replace the ferment of invention as virtuosity no longer feels the need to be seen to exist. One is moved, as often as not, less by what is expressed than by what is implied.

For about an hour or so into the film, after the ominously poised opening shots of watchful horsemen give way first to the savagery of a boar hunt, then the tranquillity of a field encampment where the business of King Lear/Lord Hidetora's abdication of power gets under way, one is fascinated but hardly engaged. Watching intrigued as Shakespeare's play is transposed to sixteenth century Japan, with Lear's three daughters transformed into warlord sons, and the notion skilfully implanted of Lord Hidetora as a ruthless dictator whose takeover by force of arms has left the country potentially seething with aggrieved factions.

Admiring the subtlety with which the silken black and yellow windbreaks staked out to form an al fresco throne room, so beautifully emblazoned with the golden sun and crescent moon of Lord Hidetora's reign, underwrite the equally extempore precariousness of his impulse to delegate power. Wondering at the delicacy of emotion when old Hidetora nods off in exhaustion, his courtiers tiptoe away in amusement, and the Cordelia son returns to plant a pair of cut branches by his side, offering not only shelter from the elements but a kind of benediction. Speculating fretfully as to whether the Fool (played by a transvestite actor), whose mime about a hare rouses so much hilarity among the lordlings, seems as alien to a modern Japanese audience as his Shakespearean prototype does to us. Admiring of the panoply of concubines and retainers deployed to herald Hidetora's

first rejection by the first of his sons.

Comes the first battle, as the Cordelia son's castle is razed during his absence in exile by his brothers, a real eye-opener lit by the fires of hell as the now semi-senile Hidetora, a fly helplessly caught in a web of his own spinning, stands petrified under a veritable cataclysm of arrows, musket-fire, swords and bleeding, burning corpses. Yet the bravura, compared with the extraordinary dynamism of the attack on Cobweb Castle at the end of *Throne of Blood*, remains curiously theoretical. It is as though the heart of the film lies elsewhere; and so it proves, through the intervention of the wives of Hidetora's two elder sons, one a ferocious Regan (or indeed Lady Macbeth, as several commentators have noted), the other a patient Cordelia.

Lady Kaede, the eldest son's wife, erupts into the film literally like a harpy, first goading her husband into a defiance of his father that results in his own death, then part-seducing, part-blackmailing his brother into accepting an offer to split the kingdom with him ('I can split you,' she snarls, whipping out a dagger, slicing a gash in his neck and

lasciviously lapping his blood) once his wife Sué's head has been delivered to her. She has cause for her virulence, since she watched her family die and her mother commit suicide when Hidetora wrested the seat of his power, the first castle, from their possession since time immemorial. In striking contrast though with equal cause, since her family was wiped out and her brother blinded by Hidetora in similar circumstances, the Lady Sué has sought refuge not in hate but in the resignation of Buddhism: 'All is decided on our past lives.'

Where Shakespeare's play is focused on future consequences as Lear discovers the extent of his folly, in other words, *Ran* is rooted in past causes. Where Shakespeare's tragedy is that of a foolish, fond old man who loved not wisely but too well, Kurosawa's is that of a monster who has bred monsters: monsters of obligation as much as of ingratitude. His wanderings over a great slag-heap vale of desolation echo not only his dream of a vast wilderness in which he called and no one answered, but his own overview of his reign as one in which 'I waged war for fifty years, and at last the plain was mine.'

His madness may have its goads in filial ingratitude and a daughter-in-law's harsh revenge, but its roots lie deeper: in the sad eyes of Lady Sué (the first person he hurries to see, as if drawn by an irresistible attraction-repulsion, on his visit to the second castle), in his haunting encounter on the plain with her blind, wandering brother Tsurumaru. From one he derives only the consolation of a religion that throws him back on acceptance of responsibility for his past. From the other, only the further torment of an unseeing, uncomprehending humility as the frightened Tsurumaru offers to play his flute in propitiation for the threat of further wrath to come: 'Lacking anything else, I

Ran: 'Lady Macbeth'.



give you hospitality of the heart.'

Having done his best for humanity and found it wanting, Lord Hidetora is a man literally plunged into hell on earth, and shadowed by a Fool (common man? alter ego? at all events, distinctly more dichotomous than Shakespeare's) torn between adoring him for what he wanted to be and wanting to kill him for what he is. And the last shot of the film, after the last battle has cleared the world of most of its protagonists, is an achingly desolate image of the human condition: blind Tsurumaru groping his way precariously towards the precipice of a towering cliff, at his feet the useless scroll bearing the consolations of

Buddha, and lost on the wind the plaintive cry of his flute.

With this summation, one comes strangely close to the heart of Kurosawa as figured by Lord Washizu, transfixed by arrows at the end of *Throne of Blood*, a man destroyed by his failure to realise the best of his ambition; by the little clerk dying in a children's playground in *Living*, happy in the thought that the empty bucket of his life, however leaky, harbours at least one tiny drop of positive purpose; by the 'record of a living being' paralysed by the spectre of nuclear war in *I Live in Fear*. Perhaps, after all, *Ran* does go some way towards constituting a spiritual self-portrait. □

There's precious little scenery in *View*—or, better, *Room*. The book's playful chapter-headings—'Lying to George', 'Lying to Cecil', etc—are preserved in period-style full titles. Dark interiors—the Pensione Bertolini (very much *not* Bertolucci), the heavy-curtained rooms at Windy Corner—are explored with feline nocturnal vision. The Protestant-shocking din and chatter in Santa Croce is lovingly recreated. The violent death in the square, which first brings together the nubile Lucy Honeychurch (Helena Bonham Carter) and the disturbing George Emerson (Julian Sands), is duly tea-tabled. The Italian picnic scenes have a touch of Renoir (*père et fils*); the English tennis is Betjeman just before his time.

So the mood's created: we never really forget that this is a book, that the characters please their creators and amuse them, and that (whatever thunderstorms may break), there'll be no opera, unless *buffa*.

The characters round the central couple beautifully (and modestly) enhance their fairy-tale. Denholm Elliott, as George's rough-diamond father, has just the déclassé, faintly apologetic bluntness that jarred so much on Edwardian gentility, a more assured Leonard Bast from *Howard's End*, perhaps, or an Arnold Bennett character in the wrong novel. Maggie Smith as cousin Charlotte, the regretful spinster chaperone, never more than slyly suggests she has an inkling of what she may have missed in life.

Most memorable of all, unsurprisingly, is Daniel Day-Lewis' Cecil Vyse, the prissy, prosy official fiancé whom Lucy finally ditches for the dishier George. Mooning about in pince-nez with a book and a quotation for every occasion, sermonising earnestly while

Love in a hot climate

A Room with a View/Richard Mayne

Lionel Trilling
Thought him thrilling;
But E. M. Forster
Feared himself an impostor.

There's a grain of truth in the clerihew. As he grew older, Forster fretted about whether he was a serious artist. In 1930, he wrote in his commonplace book: 'Shaw's *St Joan* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, into which I looked today (8.11.30), made me ashamed of my own writing. They have something to say, but I am only paring away at insincerities.'

He need hardly have worried. His fastidiousness, his cool view of the Raj, his placing friendship before politics, his puritanical anti-puritanism—all have left their deep if delicate mark. So have some of his technical quirks, like 'teatabling' death with a casual phrase in *The Longest Journey*, or regretting ('Oh dear, yes') that the novel tells a story. But there's something in the language that Forster attracts—'fretting', 'fastidiousness', 'delicate', 'quirks'—which suggests precision rather than vigour, scruple rather than fun. Remembering *A Passage to India* and *Howard's End* for their moral qualities, I'd forgotten until I saw the film and re-read the novel how witty and high-spirited Forster had been in *A Room with a View*.

It was his second novel, and the second set in Italy. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) was outwardly more ambitious, full of irony and high tragedy, with a tortuous and almost operatic plot: very much the work of a young man determined to write a powerful novel. Like it, *A Room with a View* (1908) endorsed the 'hot-blooded' image of Italy as the land where lemons and spinsters bloom—a view still cherished by young Italian males, but equally part of British and American literary history. But three years had made a difference to Forster. He was now able to poke fun at Miss Lavish (Judi Dench in the movie), whose torrid fiction was *Where Angels Fear to Tread* plus monosodium glutamate. The

result is a poised, mocking, affectionate comedy of manners without the rather willed gloom of its predecessor. Yes, Forster seemed to be saying, Italy does have this stirring effect on primly brought-up English people, and it can do them a power of good. But, really, aren't they fusspots?

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has caught the tone as precisely in her screenplay as she caught that of Henry James in *The Europeans* and (a touch less so) *The Bostonians*. James Ivory has pointed out that she was in Old Delhi writing *A Room with a View* (Curzon) while David Lean was in New Delhi writing *A Passage to India*: 'She told me she was under no illusions about who was adapting the superior novel.' The faintly implied obverse is certainly true of the rival films. *Passage* one's likely to remember for its stupendous travelogue.

A Room with a View.



the others play games, professing love but probably feeling it only for Mother, Cecil is the ace of wimps. As played by Daniel Day-Lewis, he has all the un-boring boringness of a Jane Austen bore. He also looks like a beardless Lytton Strachey. As a cameo, the performance is a gem.

And the lovers? They didn't quite convince me: I wonder if they really convinced Forster. There seemed more charge in the male nude bathing scene. That's not to say that Helena Bonham Carter and Julian Sands were in any

way inadequate—except in their blurred, very modern accents which would have jarred on Edwardian ears. She looked pretty, eager, bewildered, half-aroused, wilful, then relaxed and happy on honeymoon; he might be Britain's answer (or one of them) to Gérard Depardieu. But brother Freddy (Rupert Graves) looked to me more of a match for Lucy: there seemed to be fondness there, not fairytale love. But then the heroes and heroines of fairy-tales are not often very interesting. Except to each other. And even then... □

Great Expectations

The Color Purple/Richard Combs

Back before *E.T.*, before *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Jaws*, before even *Duel* rolled out of living-rooms and into cinemas, Steven Spielberg directed a television movie called *Something Evil*. In it, Sandy Dennis, a grass widow stuck in a converted farmhouse while her husband commuted to his advertising job in the city, was assailed by nasty demons of place, which turned her and her two young children against each other. It was an occult movie before the genre had picked up steam in the cinema, but it had a nice feel for family frictions, for the petty storms and alarms for which the occult could have been a metaphor. It comes to mind often during *The Color Purple* (Columbia-EMI-Warner), and might be a significant point of reference, both because it disproves the wild talk that, just because it's not an illusion of Industrial Light & Magic, *The Color Purple* is breaking new ground for Spielberg, and because it suggests

a profound connection between his cinematic 'effectiveness' and those storms and alarms, between the need they create and the kind of cinema Spielberg has made.

The family stands at the centre of his cinema—of his universe—and antipathy to his films has intensified as that family has come to be identified more and more with Disney, with wholesome (if turbulent) kitchens and wholesome (if breathless) entertainment. *The Color Purple* may not affect this reputation substantially, even though it is adapted from a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about a poor black girl who passes by way of incest and lesbianism to womanhood, sisterhood and selfhood. As some American critics have already complained, Spielberg is capable of Disneyising that as well. Although his adaptation is remarkably faithful in incident and detail to Alice Walker's original, he has opened out its hard epistolary style—a cramped, choppy but

acutely expressive vernacular—in more lushly swooning, even buffoonish mood.

What he has also done is harder to categorise as a betrayal of his source, but it is to surround the specificity of Walker's family with an aura of 'familyness' in which Spielberg plunges back into his cinematic history, wrapping it round him as a surrogate family. This is not just a matter of movie-brat cuteness; in the context it is quite appropriate. In the context, that is, of a story which begins soon after the turn of the century, with young Celie (Whoopi Goldberg), used, brutalised and rejected ('You got the ugliest smile this side of creation'), made pregnant by the man she believes is her father, then passed in marriage to another tyrannical male, Albert Johnson (Danny Glover), it is appropriate that the film should tie her growing up to a cinematic education of its own. For all that Alice Walker makes the case—at times rather diagrammatically—for a modern, black, feminist consciousness, Celie's story reads like a Victorian novel. So Spielberg finds just the right detail when he links her sentimental education, her slow assertion of an individual will, to her gradually more confident reading of *Oliver Twist* (like Montag in *Fahrenheit 451* enunciating 'I was born...') from *David Copperfield*. Walker's male chauvinists also come off the screen like D. W. Griffith brutes.

In Spielberg's hands, this becomes not suggestive allusion but straight filmmaking know-how, grist to the mill of one of the most effective narrative techniques in contemporary cinema. Which is why *The Color Purple* is also full of Lean-like transitions (a Spielberg model for his editor's way of cutting through a story) and Ford-like compositions. Both have also played their part in carrying on the Victorian-Griffith family romance, and an early scene in *The Color Purple*—Celie walking behind her mother's hearse—echoes the beginning of *Doctor Zhivago*, and the family imbroglio that is the start of the young hero's troubles. (Lean's funeral scene in turn has the *agitato* of his *Great Expectations*, while Spielberg's placid graveside grouping is after Ford.) Later, when Albert Johnson first comes to press his suit for Celie's sister Nettie (Akosua Busia), the two girls watch giggling from inside the house, clearing condensation from the window to watch their father and Albert in two separate 'cameos', evocative of both silent cinema and some of Lean's ice and snow effects. Overall, what Spielberg has done to *The Color Purple* combines the spare drive of *The Searchers* with the gloomy lushness of *Doctor Zhivago*.

What all this imagery of the family in cinema (and the family of cinema) does, it seems, is to make up a loss. Whatever differences must separate a black feminist like Walker and a suburban fantasist like Spielberg, they come

The Color Purple.



together in their attitude towards the men, the fathers and husbands, of the family. To the novel's Celie, they are for most of the time a natural visitation, like bad weather, inscrutable and unquestionable; when she first discovers love through Shug Avery (Margaret Avery), the blues singer who sleeps with both her and Albert, Celie confesses that she had never thought of men that way, that to her they all looked the same. She even refers to Albert throughout as 'Mr—', which perhaps has its echo in Spielberg's trick of keeping his father figure an off-screen menace in *E.T.*, identified only by the heavy bunch of keys that hang at his hip (this is the security man tracking alien/vagrant child *E.T.*, who probably has the ugliest smile the other side of creation). *E.T.* might be the Spielberg film that is closest to *The Color Purple*, just as it is the one that reveals most about its author: the divorced parents, an attempt to restock the home from the imagination, to make up family from the family the cinema has to offer. In *Close*



Whoopi Goldberg (left).

Encounters, after all, alien visitors were a self-conscious metaphor for film-making itself, conjuring imaginary playmates and magical toys.

From *Something Evil*'s bereft wife to *E.T.*'s lonely mother, Spielberg is well placed to capture Walker's rage at her variously absent, inadequate or weakly bullying fathers and husbands. He gives

full measure to one of her big scenes, a communal dinner at which all the men are laughed into submission and Celie finally stands up to Albert. And nobody is better placed to capture the populist, *Roots* aspect of *The Color Purple*. Early on, Celie is forcibly separated from her sister Nettie—when the latter rejects Albert's advances—and subsequently languishes in the belief that Nettie has died, until with Shug's help she finds the letters Albert has been hiding from her. Nettie has made her way to Africa with a black missionary couple—who also happen to have adopted the two children Celie had by her supposed father. What follows is a delirium of intercutting between Georgia and Africa until the family is reunited; and one realises why Spielberg would have been attracted to such an episodic story: the possibilities for transitions are endless, for tying up loose threads of family. What he has done is not to turn Walker's novel into Disney but to realise its potential as both the *Great Expectations* and *Gone With the Wind* of black culture. □

Love among the waxworks

Caravaggio/John Russell Taylor

Derek Jarman is an admittedly, even a wilfully, marginal figure in the British cinema. Since the tradition of dissent is almost as rigidly codified as the tradition of mainline film-making, certain things are expected of him: not only certain kinds of success, but also, with even more confidence, certain kinds of mistake. The mistake most confidently expected is, of course, selling out: taking the Establishment's filthy lucre must, we grimly assume, mean that one ends up inevitably making their sort of film. Hence *Caravaggio* (BFI) has been looked forward to by Jarman enthusiasts with hope and almost as much trepidation.

At least the finished film makes it clear that all such considerations are irrelevant. It may be doubted whether Jarman has any puritanical objections on principle to taking the money; it is in any case evident that he could hardly sell out and make a straightforward commercial movie if he tried. Probably Jarman would love to have the budget of *Dune* at his disposal, but if he did he would be sure to do in his own way just what David Lynch did in his: make a very expensive alternative movie. Not, of course, that the backing of the BFI and Channel 4 for *Caravaggio* ('half the budget of a Duran Duran promo') can count as big money—except in relation to what Jarman has had to work with before—but as we know it is as easy to sell out for a crocodile-skin handbag as for a quarter of a million.

All the same, *Caravaggio* remains quintessentially a Jarman film, with all the advantages and drawbacks that

implies. It was shot in 35mm, it uses several well-known stage actors, and it tells the life story of a famous artist, but *The Agony and the Ecstasy* it is not, and never could be. For one thing, Jarman has never been keen on story-telling *per se*, and he does not mend his ways here; indeed, he uses even less dialogue than usual to tell his tale, and resolves the flashback reconstruction of Caravaggio's life into a series of tableaux which from time to time threaten to freeze

altogether. The thematic links with his earlier works are self-evident: Caravaggio, despite some intermittent evidences of bisexuality, remains primarily a homosexual icon, like *Sebastiane*, and is characterised throughout as a sort of Renaissance punk à la *Jubilee*. The painterly preoccupations of *Sebastiane* and *The Tempest* are of course even more in evidence: visually, almost every individual shot in the film is stunning, exquisitely composed in rich colour and given plenty of time for us to appreciate its niceties.

In other words, a bit more money has not prevented it from being just the film we might hope the maker of *The Angelic*

Caravaggio: 'The Concert of Youths'.



Conversation to make it angelically presented with a bit more cash. Why, then, should we have any reservations? Perhaps the grounds for doubt can be most succinctly summed up by suggesting that it aims at being Pasolini and comes out as Markopoulos. At one point in the film Caravaggio says, 'All art is against lived experience.' It is not too clear what he means, but it is tempting to apply the dictum to the film itself in its most extreme sense: that all art must set itself against lived experience, deliberately aim to create an alternative world. In this Jarman is at one with Markopoulos and ultimately, perhaps fatally, at odds with Pasolini.

Pasolini, of course, does create an alternative world, as to some extent all film-making must. But it is always in the heart of, and deliberately constructed out of, lived experience: that is what gives even his most obscure films, like *Porcile*, their peculiar hold on the imagination. A film like *The Illiac Passion*, on the other hand, aims at some kind of art for art's sake, replacing the fabric of lived experience with a wholly artificial construct. In *Caravaggio* Jarman seems constantly in danger of doing likewise. There are far too many *poses plastiques*, far too little happening in the minds or the souls of the participants that could really breathe life into them. The published script contains quite a lot of voice-over explanation which has been eliminated, presumably at a very late stage, from the film itself. In a sense it might help, but in another sense Jarman was right to cut, on the grounds that if what is being said is not there in the images already, no amount of words will put it there. However, if it proves not to be there after all, then he must needs take responsibility for its absence.

Certainly his cast cannot be blamed. Nigel Terry as the mature Caravaggio is a handsome, intense, tortured figure: he looks right, dies graphically and does at least convince us that a man who looked like this and acted like this could possibly have painted Caravaggio's works. If he fails to convey the white heat of creation, that inclines one to think that the 'silence of the studio' Jarman has spoken of is such an interior thing that previous film-makers have steered clear of it with good reason. As for the other characters, we have little idea even what sort of people they are supposed to be. What sort of person, for example, is Ranuccio, Caravaggio's blond *homme fatal*, and how is his attitude towards Caravaggio meant to be read, beyond that of a stereotypical enigma? Nigel Davenport manages to tell us a bit more about Marchese Giustiniani just by being Nigel Davenport, but is not given enough space to do it thoroughly. Sometimes Jarman wilfully obfuscates, as by having the model for Caravaggio's most outrageous and exhibitionistic image of

the young male, 'Amor Vincit Omnia', played inexplicably by a girl. In the end, only Michael Gough, as the sly but comfortingly donnish Cardinal who takes the young Caravaggio under his wing, manages to make a rounded, believable character, and the scene in which he is teaching the boy to read philosophy is almost the only point where the film is humanly touching.

Enthusiasts, or Jarman himself, might reasonably answer that it is no part of the film's purpose to work in that sentimental, anecdotal way. But if a



Nigel Terry (Caravaggio).

film-maker chooses to abandon the resources of conventional dramaturgy he must surely put something peculiarly compelling in their place. A Bresson, an Ozu, a Dreyer can enthrall us while little or nothing happens, little or nothing is said. Heavy comparisons indeed, but by making films the way he does Jarman courts them, and would probably not wish to be judged by any but the highest standards. By the standards normal in the British cinema, *Caravaggio* is an enterprise of extraordinary daring and resource, carried out with a single-mindedness—and sheer efficiency—which cannot be faulted. By the standard of Bresson or Pasolini, unfortunately, it remains all too suggestive of love among the wax-works. The breath of life is somehow lacking—even that rarified, inexplicable life which, in art, can make us accept the most rigorously abstracted as a part of lived experience rather than a counterblast to it. □

Prima la musica Ginger & Fred Gilbert Adair

Pace Noël Coward, there is one thing more potent than cheap music: great music. Except, that is to say, in the cinema, a medium which is essentially metaphoric and metamorphic; which has been known to 'cheapen' the better to exalt; and whose most characteristic modes of grandeur, unlike those of 'higher' art forms, are not of a type to make the spectator feel small. Thus what is required for almost any film, instead of the often trumpery appropriation of classical music as what might be termed an ennobling agent, is music that isn't so much incidental as coincidental, music that coincides with the director's vision to the point where it sounds uncannily as though he composed it himself. Cheap music, to be sure, for the most part; and, for a great director, great cheap music.

Of the few such musico-filmic collaborations, none seemed more mutually beneficial than that long enjoyed by Federico Fellini and Nino Rota. In fact, in the light of subsequent evidence, it could be argued that Rota's death in 1979 was a personal tragedy for the director. With the febrile perseverance of James Stewart's Scottie in *Vertigo*, Fellini has been seeking not merely a successor to, but a facsimile of, his beloved court musician; and his understandable dissatisfaction with attempts at ersatz Rota (Luis Bakalov's tinny cocktail-lounge score for *La Città delle Donne*) has actually begun to orient the subject-matter of his films: the world of opera in *E la Nave Va* (for which he selected the most accessibly 'cheap'—or the most Rota-esque—themes of Verdi, Debussy and Ponchielli) and now, in *Ginger & Fred*, that of the Hollywood musical by which Rota was patently influenced. What I mean to imply, then, is that these films exist as a direct consequence of Rota's death and would not have been made had it not prematurely occurred. And I will go even further: without Fellini, Rota remained a gifted film composer (as witness his gorgeous score for *The Leopard*); without Rota, it could be argued that Fellini has been immeasurably diminished as an artist.

First of all, choreographically. The premise of *Ginger & Fred* is oddly akin to that of Neil Simon's *The Sunshine Boys*. Giulietta Masina and Marcello Mastroianni play a nineteen-thirties dance team reunited in present-day Rome (fifty years on? the chronology here seems slightly askew) to participate, along with assorted midgets, transsexuals, defrocked clerics and oddball

'speciality acts', in a luxuriantly garish television superproduction, or 'Big Broadcast of 1986'. Though a lot of the film's running time is devoted to an acidulous satire of television (of which more later), it concludes with the self-styled 'Ginger and Fred' stepping hand in hand on to the vast, silvery, disklike sound stage to perform their fossilised routine. However cantankerous and oozing with bile the scenes preceding it, this one, so we trust, will find Fellini in his most transcendent 'Barnum and ballet' manner—a moment of sheer, a-narrative magic.

Well, talk of flat champagne. The sequence, all fifteen minutes of it, is quite clunkingly laboured, reminiscent of Bogdanovich's *At Long Last Love* rather than of *Top Hat*. It would have been silly to expect Masina and Mastroianni to rival their characters' peerlessly debonair namesakes—in a sense, the whole point of the scene, the pressed-flower charm of the epiphany it strains to effect, is that they cannot. Well or badly, though, one does expect them to *dance*, not negligently whirl their legs to and fro, fro and to, like twin sets of twiddled thumbs. And the problem is the music. What Rota's perky motoric rhythms and roguishly swooning melodic lines (witty, nostalgic, Europeanised paraphrases of Kern and Berlin) called for onscreen was a sort of treadmill trot, part-danced, part-shuffled, with the film-maker's *dramatis personae* either advancing laterally along layered planes of movement that seemed as spatially discrete from each other as theatre flats (as in the excursion to the ocean liner in *Amarcord*) or propelled by a circusy,

conga-like rotation—or Rota-tion (as during the delirious, Fellinissimus apotheosis of *8½*). The genuine article—30s' popular music—imposes a totally different system of choreographic conventions, to which Fellini's performers are not equal, alas.

Similarly, the scenes in and around the television studio, as the two forlorn old troupers come to terms with the punkish fauna of the 1980s, are—for this director—strangely verveless and unfocused. Without Rota's quickening pulse to lend it shape and dynamic, Fellini's fabled fertility of imagination is liable to strike one as less generous than profligate. Grown sloppy, he *squanders* his imagery: one would have to be fairly lynx-eyed just to catch a glimpse of the raven-haired gypsy stunner who, albeit in privileged, cropped isolation, gave such a mouth-watering (and misleading) impression of the film on the cover of this magazine's Winter issue. Midgets are now too caricaturally Fellinian to afford us much astonishment (though one notes with considerable relief the absence of nuns and cardinals); and, drifting in and out of the frame with increasing aimlessness, the other colourfully caparisoned freaks end by dissolving into a gaudy, pixilated blur.

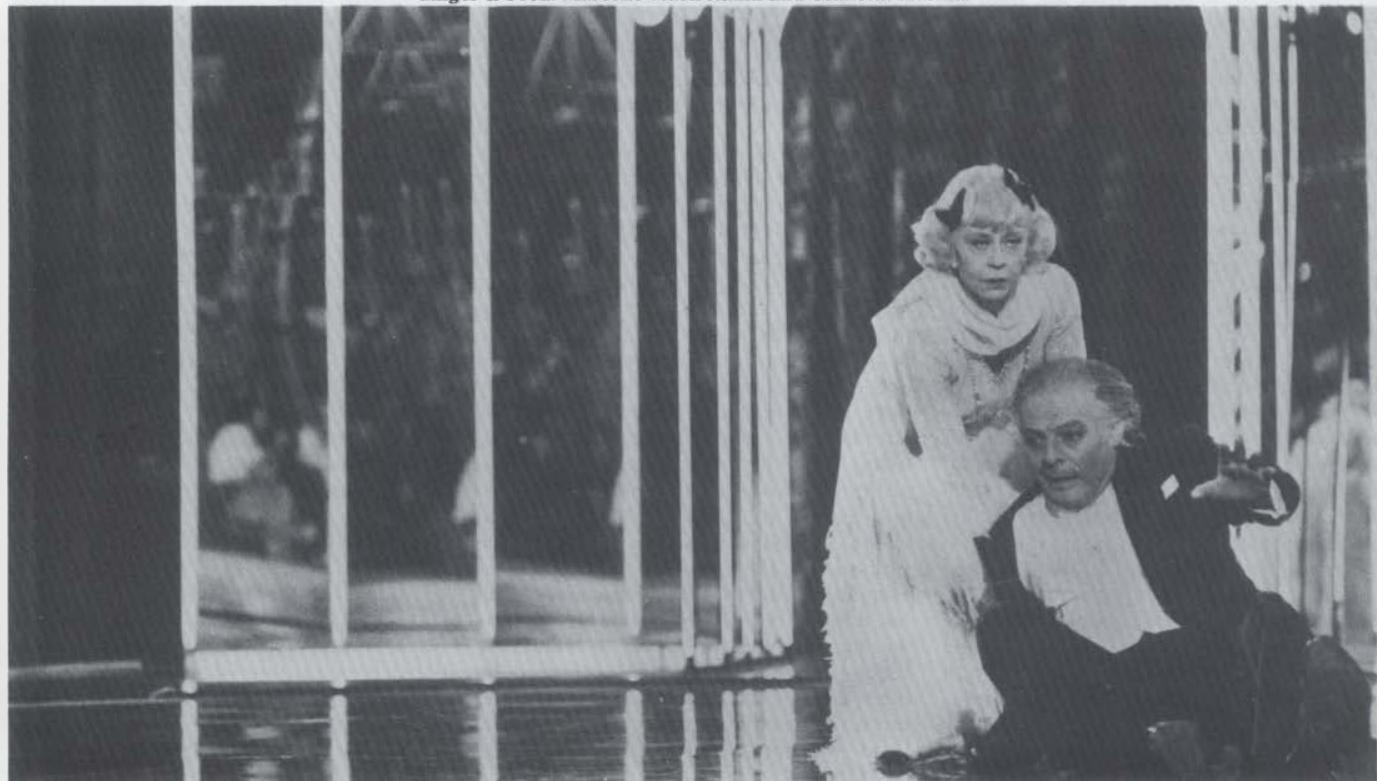
The impoverishment is a choreographic but also an emotional one. *Ginger & Fred* is not the first of Fellini's films to have its warm Mediterranean lyricism chilled by a shiver from the void: one has only to recall the *Satyricon* and *Casanova*. Yet these were not satires (and I wonder whether the cinema can ever truly assimilate the systematised sarcasm proper to satire),

they were coquettishly nihilistic farces. Aesthetically, it is of little consequence that what Fellini 'has to say' about the way television plugs up every vacant space of (some of) our lives with its insidious audio-visual stream-of-consciousness proves to be old news (and what he loathes most in the medium—its vulgarity, its garrulity, its insatiable consumerist appetites—would apply no less to the cinema itself). More disturbing is the fact that his, in truth, somewhat dated and Tashlinesque railery gradually seeps out into a more generalised misanthropy (and misogyny), as though he had concocted his gallery of flamboyant monstrosities with the sole purpose of corroborating his detractors' worst suspicions. Even pasta becomes in this film the wormy object of his disgust!

But what has all this to do with Nino Rota? Only that the ghostly, goose-pimply music-box waltzes he composed for *Casanova*, let's say, however macabre, were nevertheless waltzes. Waltzes, by their very nature and no matter how they might be 'subverted', are sweet, joyous, old-fashioned things, and it was that old-fashioned sweetness that pervaded the film and significantly coloured our perception of its mood.

If, in *Ginger & Fred*, the 'mood' now seems peculiarly phoney, it is perhaps because a Rota score served less as an accompaniment than as a Platonic distillation; that it could be more seamlessly, airily 'Fellinian' than the Maestro himself; and that, finally, to re-coin Walter Pater's celebrated dictum, Fellini's art has always been aspiring to the condition of Rota's music. □

Ginger & Fred: Marcello Mastroianni and Giulietta Masina.



The Magician

ORSON WELLES
A Biography
 by Barbara Leaming
 Weidenfeld &
 Nicolson/£14.95

THE MAKING OF CITIZEN KANE
 by Robert L. Carringer
 John Murray/£8.95

Barbara Leaming makes no bones about this being a sympathetic biography. During the research she was encouraged to spend as much time as she wanted talking to Welles in person or on the phone. She seems to have taken advantage of this generous offer: '... I can only hope that this book does some small justice to a very great man, whose laughter and friendship I cherish, and whose joy in living has been a lesson to me.'

Well, it does. But you see the intoxicating effect of his charm already at work on the prose. As Leaming discovers while beginning at the beginning, everybody was in love with Orson, even as a boy and a youth; not just women, but teachers, mentors, bosses, even the fathers of other boys. He did a lot of polite running for it. Two good friends of mine, perfectly sane fellows normally working with him on his last long interview for television, would begin to go weak at the knees and babble o' green fields. So if there is a cautionary note to strike before recommending the Leaming book, it is to point out that while she relishes Orson's jokes, stunts and hyperbole elsewhere, it seldom occurs to her that he might be winding her up too, occasionally, so engaging is his charm.

As a teenager hitching through Morocco, did he really spend a fortnight with the Pasha of Marrakesh's concubines? (Maybe.) Did he really do a vaudeville act where he sawed Dolores del Rio and Rita Hayworth in half? (Yes, of course.) The book is full of stories that make you blink, but speculation, naturally, will revolve more seriously around those eternal Welles controversies of more substance. Where was his charm when it came to the moneymen? Was he in the grip of a 'fear-of-completion' syndrome, as Charles Higham has it, or was he simply let down, time after time? Was he profligate and undisciplined, irresponsible and quickly bored, or were these simply distorted views of genius offered by lesser talents who couldn't cope with the pace, intensity, scope or originality of his demands?

Leaming's view obviously finds

for Orson every time, and in its thoroughness manages to be largely persuasive. The early problems at RKO cannot simply be attributed either to Welles or Schaefer. The studio head, particularly, comes out of every account nobly, championing Welles against internal opposition, pinning faith time and again on the impossible odds—an unknown director, bigger budgets than RKO could handle, technical refinement and experiment on a daunting scale and in every department. *Heart of Darkness* did prove finally unapproachable, but they didn't do badly from the fall-back position: a cheaper, shorter, studio-bound little picture about a newspaper tycoon. Was it Schaefer's fault, or Welles', that Hearst's enmity almost made distribution impossible, or that it would take the public a decade or two to realise that *Kane* had created a new language?

Desperate to live up to his promises to Schaefer, Welles ran through several ideas before settling with Schaefer on a collaboration on *Journey into Fear*, a quick picture, *Ambersons*, which his Mercury players had already done on radio, and a longer-term four-parter, *It's All True*, which he'd really get down to once the first two were out of the way. In the middle of *Ambersons*, a government committee, headed by Rockefeller, asked him to film the Rio carnival as part of a wartime effort to woo the South Americas. Welles persuaded them to bankroll it as part of the *It's All True* project. Throughout January 1942 he was shooting *Ambersons* during the day, sometimes on two sets at once (with Harry Wild as second camera) since Cortez was slow, acting for Norman Foster on *Journey into Fear* at night and running into rushes in the morning without sleep.

The carnival wouldn't wait for Orson, so he had three days and nights in a cutting room with Robert Wise and the *Ambersons* rushes before taking a dawn flight to Brazil. He was prevented, by various factors including duty to his Rockefeller commission, from ever working directly with an editor on *Ambersons* again. The shredded version that the studio eventually put out in his name he regarded as a travesty and a betrayal. To add insult to injury, Rockefeller later withdrew the backing for *It's All True* and that was never completed either.

So it goes with project after project, argues Leaming, both in the theatre and cinema. Orson began the crazy process of hiring himself out as an actor to pay to finish movies no one else would. With his \$100,000 from *Jane Eyre* he began by having to pay to

develop rushes, untouched by the studio, that he had shot in Brazil. He subsequently signed away all his rights in *Kane* to buy the negative of *It's All True*. Harry Cohn didn't understand the structure of *Lady from Shanghai* and had it entirely recut. Though Republic were delighted with the 21-day shooting schedule and on-budget *Macbeth*, they couldn't understand the year it took on post-production—and here one sympathises. He had to put his own money into *Othello* and can't understand why people complained that it took him four years to finish: other directors might have been praised for perseverance and dedication. Again the studio didn't understand *Touch of Evil*, and took it away from him—not, as Higham and others have argued, another case of neglect. Nobody wanted to put up money for *Quixote*. Mike Todd pulled out of *Around the World* on stage. The Salkinds ran out of cash halfway through *The Trial*. A Spanish crook salted away most of the Iranian backing for *The Other Side of the Wind*, which is still unfinished...

These problems are familiar to all film-makers. Perhaps they seem more acute with Welles because he attempted so much more than anyone. He was at

a sharp collision point between a necessarily extravagant art and a would-be efficient business. He gave enormously and was astounded when the gift was not reciprocated. He demanded enormously and was astonished when that was resented. Leaming shows the same pattern in his other careers—theatre, radio, politics (there was serious talk of his nomination as Secretary General of the United Nations)—and in his personal relations. Only his extraordinary tie with his old school mentor, Roger 'Skipper' Hill, seems to have survived all vicissitudes. Perhaps he was astonished as much, at the end, at how so much good will could have provoked so much mistrust and jealousy.

Robert Carringer's short, admirable monograph is not quite so forgiving as Barbara Leaming's, but it gives short shrift to the Houseman-Kael-Higham school of debunking. With scrupulous academic method, but blessedly elegant prose, he traces the contributions variously made to *Heart of Darkness*, *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* by collaborators, from Schaefer himself to humble but invaluable special effects men. His conclusion on the Mankiewicz affair is balanced:

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'Citizen Kane' is the only major Welles film on which the writing credit is shared. Not coincidentally, it is also the Welles film that has the strongest story, the most fully realised characters, and the most carefully sculpted dialogue. Mankiewicz made the difference. While his efforts may seem plodding next to Welles' flashy touches of genius, they are of fundamental importance nevertheless.'

He also points out that however much Welles depended on fine collaborators, they were the first to acknowledge who had the ideas. James Stewart, dubbing mixer on *Kane*, says that much of what he knows aesthetically about sound he learned from Welles. Bernard Herrmann called him, unlike most directors, 'a man of great musical culture'. What, you often wonder, given a fair breeze, could he not have done, this side of the wind?

GAVIN MILLAR

Not so much a catalogue

THE CINEMA BOOK

edited by Pam Cook

BFI/£12.95 (paper)

The Cinema Book is such a non-committal title that the profane reader has to turn to Pam Cook's introduction to discover what its purpose is. The idea was to replace the 'unwieldy set of duplicated documents' which was all the BFI Education Department could offer by way of a catalogue of its film teaching extracts with something altogether more glossy and more suited to the expanded world of film studies. So it took five years to produce and, like Topsy, it grew, turning into a fascinating volume which, alas for the extracts, is virtually useless as a catalogue.

For as long as I can remember, what film extracts are available, to whom, and at what price, have been matters hotly debated through the columns of the national press. *The Cinema Book* settles the issue at a stroke by the simple expedient, much favoured by librarians, of providing information wildly in excess of need. Around the existing (or perhaps revised) catalogue 'entries', which are printed on darker paper so that, at least in theory, they stand out on the page, there has accrued a mass of other material. This book is therefore just as unwieldy as the duplicated sheets. It is expensive and badly bound (my copy started to come apart after only two or three sessions of page flicking).

What's worse, it is very diffi-

cult to find one's way around, with a complicated system of cross-referencing that requires the kind of deft fingering immediately commanded only by those in the habit of checking the grammars of highly inflected languages. There are also two indexes, one listing proper names and films in a conventionally accepted manner, the other the extracts themselves according to a classification that remains impenetrable until one suddenly realises that it is, in fact, the Education Department's original 'Extract Information'. For the absolute beginner like myself, the contents page might also have been more illuminating, and it would have been nice to have had a bibliography, instead of the 'list of references' tucked away at the end of each section but nowhere listed in full. In view of the spread of information technology in schools—and also the need to go on updating the extract catalogue—I do wonder why the catalogue wasn't simply issued on disc or published in microfiche form which would at least have been easy to handle.

However, the reader who learns to stop worrying about film extracts and starts to love initiation rites can have a lot of fun with this volume. It will perhaps come as no surprise (in view of the foregoing) that the notorious index contains but one reference to the man who inspired it all. Pam Cook and her collaborators, all of whom are eminent in the world of film and media studies, are really the children who sat beside Paddy Whannel taking notes—and faith, they printed them! This book is a compendium of film culture as invented by Whannel during his long tenure as head of the Education Department; in a sense, that is its *raison d'être*. The various sections, on the history of the cinema, genre, authorship, narrative codes and what is called the 'structuralist controversy', are an archaeology of film studies in Britain, charting the way thinking about the cinema evolved from *Movie to Screen*.

If one compares this line-up with the evolution of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which as Jim Hillier demonstrates in the introduction to the recent volume of translations, was the most significant influence on British film studies of the last thirty years, one extraordinary lacuna emerges—that of a separate section on Marxist film criticism. This is not only odd in view of the fact that *Cahiers* went through a Marxist period in the late 60s and early 70s, and *Screen* duly followed suit in its discussions of Althusser, Brecht, Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and others. It is also a strange reading of the British tradition.

There is a section in this book on the British film industry, and another on 'British social realism 1959-63', but nothing on the documentary tradition, on Grierson or, indeed, on Whannel's attempts to steer a course between wholesale endorsement of Hollywood and idiot reflection theories of the kind propounded by cultural tankies.

Another absence that is extraordinary, not because of Whannel's teaching but because of what has been happening in book publishing and television production, is that of a separate section on women in the cinema or on feminist film criticism whose literature is burgeoning. More than half the contributors to this book are women, and most are feminists (Cook herself, Gledhill, Kuhn, Root . . .), so perhaps some dark score-settling has been going on in British Film Institute publications which would explain this turn of events.

Of course, such collective works are always uneven and partial, and rather than prescribing what should have been in them one should accept what is good. The two sections I found particularly lucid and informative, and in which simplification grew out of erudition, were 'History of the Cinema' and 'Narrative Codes', while the section I found confusing and irritatingly inaccurate was 'The Structuralist Controversy'. It was odd to find that Bazin figured there, and bizarre to learn that Lévi-Strauss was considered a major influence on British film culture while Althusser was not.

This is anything but a handy work of reference, clearly, but it will provide hard-pressed teachers with more than enough new ways of tackling well-worn texts. But whatever the analytical approaches suggested here, *The Cinema Book* is ultimately only as good as the extract collection which it all but drowns. And that, as Pam Cook rather sadly points out, leaves much to be desired. The 'History of the Cinema' section is showing particular signs of age, which is why Japanese cinema, for example, does not figure in it despite the publication of much recent work. The volume therefore stands as a monument to a period when money was less tight, and extracts could be more easily acquired. I would maintain, it also testifies to a thoroughly retrograde approach to education and new technologies in a film industry whose sovereign contempt for any kind of reflection on film explains why a book such as this is necessary in the first place, and accounts for its limitations. Not so much a catalogue, more a way of life.

JILL FORBES

Will-o'-the-wisps?

FILM

The Front Line 1983

by Jonathan Rosenbaum

FILM

The Front Line 1984

by David Ehrenstein

Arden Press (Denver, Colorado) \$10.95 each

Rosenbaum and Ehrenstein, Rosenbaum and Ehrenstein. Film criticism being as a rule what it is—paradoxically, both eclectic and very exclusive (note Jonas Mekas' custom with new books on film history, 'The first thing I do, I look through the name index. If the names of Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, and Bruce Baillie are missing, I throw the book out as amateurish and not serious')—it would be easy to equate these two American critics with the Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern of Tom Stoppard's play, pursuing such will-o'-the-wisps as narrative and non-narrative, *grandes syntagmes* and abstract flows of image and sound, the 'culture machine' and the representational status quo. Meanwhile, offstage and occasionally obtruding upon their giddy solipsistic reveries, unfolds the true drama: the dry-ice, wet-dream factory, or The Cinema As We Know It. Film critics being as a rule what they are, it is the 'avant-garde' that is for most of them (of us) amateurish and not serious, a perception that Rosenbaum and Ehrenstein hope to correct.

The purpose of their elegantly produced books, the first of a planned annual series, is, at least according to the back flap blurb, to 'treat approximately 20 filmmakers who are changing the shape of the movies shown in our neighbourhood theaters, though their work will likely never be seen there.' That, as it happens, is a curiously misleading gloss, not merely because it is hard to detect the influence of Beth B and Scott B's *Vortex* on *Rocky IV* or Philippe Garrel's *La Cicatrice Intérieure* on *The Color Purple*, but because it appears to be proposing a reductive vision of the avant-garde as a kind of experimental clearing-house whose crude, often flaky products are not to be absorbed in and of themselves but are to be channelled into the all-engulfing mainstream.

Both Rosenbaum and Ehrenstein, by contrast, respond to the medium's 'front line' as an adventure, or as a cross-cultural voyage of discovery, whose

successive embankments and disembarkations may be as significant and as worthy of being recorded as the passage itself. Unlike what passes, cavalierly and un-Mekasly, for 'film history', unlike, too, the unselective way a Stallone or a Spielberg movie is transmitted around the world, in cinemas as anonymous and indistinguishable as television sets, the history of the avant-garde remains intimately linked to that of its audiences, its institutionalised venues, its near-legendary screenings and fierce sectarianism.

A frankly autobiographical strain runs through both books (in particular, Rosenbaum's), and I have never had so vividly conveyed to me the sense of critics actually in the process of discovering, then wondering at and worrying at the films about which they have been briefed to write. (I especially warmed to Rosenbaum's account of his eleventh hour inclusion in the book of Leslie Thornton and the consequent struggle to respect his deadline: as he pertinently comments, 'It is the very suppression of this sort of information that falsifies most kinds of film criticism, even while it makes it more "usable", by naturalising its constructed coordinates—a principle on which his marvellous *Moving Places* was founded.) This strain, allied to literary styles which are chewy, committed, even pugnacious, and also, in both cases, to a quite brilliant gift for description (the capacity to describe with exactitude what happens on the screen—the more so in a modernist work, which, though not necessarily subverting its own 'narrative', certainly does subvert any written synopsis of that narrative—is a rare and enviable one, indeed) sets their criticism apart from the clotted, clerkish academicism that mars so much British writing in the same field.

An intriguing aspect of *The Front Line* is that it locates

two natural enemies for the avant-garde film: to quote Ehrenstein, 'the commercial marketplace (which ignores it), and the academic establishment (committed to embalming it).' It is also intriguing, in view of Mekas' practice mentioned above, that (with the exception of Jacobs) neither author has elected to focus on those weary trouvers of the American underground Establishment, on what Ehrenstein calls 'Brakhagemarkopoulosangerjacobsgehrfampton-etc', whose failure, after thirty years, to obtain a wider audience than that of their own circle of reciprocal admiration, must strike one as, just this once, not the fault of the rest of us.

On the other hand, both are catholic enough to find space for film-makers whose work has benefited from, in this context, a fairly liberal circuit of distribution (Rosenbaum on Rivette, Straub and Huillet, Akerman and Michael Snow; Ehrenstein on Schroeter, Ruiz and, provocatively but persuasively, Welles). The difficulty for a non-specialist and European reader arises with studies of artists with whom he or she is unlikely to be at all conversant: e.g. such names as Manuel de Landa, Sara Driver, David Brooks and Warren Sonbert. Yet, despite sometimes abusing a nervous and slightly off-putting introductory formula whereby a film is, until shown to be something else again, 'apparently just a sequence of disconnected images' or 'apparently just a plotless home movie', the arguments are put with sustained cogency and wit, and strange little planets, light years away from Hollywood's solar system, swim into our ken.

These two volumes, then, are essential reading for anyone who begins to suspect that of which Rosenbaum and Ehrenstein, in their different ways, are both convinced: that there is something rotten in the state of the cinema.

GILBERT ADAIR

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Gervais and Godard

SIR.—I believe the editors of *SIGHT AND SOUND* have been a little disingenuous in not asking Marc Gervais to declare his Jesuit credentials which, if they do not determine, must at least affect the space from which he speaks. Obviously, *Je Vous Salut, Marie* poses special problems for Catholic spectators; but no more so in essence than Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St Matthew* before it or Rossellini's *The Little Flowers of St Francis* before that. While Godard's film may seem a little more extreme, what Godard has always done and is still vigorously doing is to de-familiarise the familiar by re-contextualising it, thereby creating for the spectator a problem of tone. Is this film serious? Is it funny? Is it great art? Or is Godard having us on? If this problem of tone was present in *Vivre sa Vie*, it is still present in *Je Vous Salut, Marie*. The answer to these questions, then as now, is that Godard's work has been simultaneously and indivisibly serious and funny. Godard has always created great art by having us on.

What is missing from Father Gervais' analysis is any sense of politics or history—the two realms of activity which, along with a yearning for Romantic Love, have informed Godard's work from the very beginning. Yet look at *Détective*, surely the most accessible of Godard's recent films!

Confined 'to a few rooms in a turn-of-the-century hotel' the film certainly is; but think of the role hotels have played in many Godard films, especially in *Alphaville*, in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, and in *Prénom: Carmen*. All these richly appointed spaces represent worlds within worlds; and since they are also places where intricate deals take place, involving sums of money, they might also be seen as microcosms of our capitalist world.

In *Détective*, since Monsieur

Jim has at different times the surname of either Fox or Warner, we might assume that Godard is making one of his frequent jokes about the financial machinations of Hollywood. But there is more here than a joke. Nearly everyone in this film owes money to someone else and they all seem dependent in some way on the Mafiosa Prince who, compared with banks, is an angel. Since no one is financially independent, no one is secure in their relationships with one another. Furthermore, as in *Vivre sa Vie* back in 1962, women seem especially dependent on men who have money. In *Détective*, a single cut connects *la poitrine des jeunes filles* with *l'argent des hommes*. And so Françoise, who then changes her name to Geneviève, deserts her sad but kindly husband, who cannot bargain toughly enough in this mafiosa world, for Monsieur Jim Fox Warner, who has access to at least some of the cash.

One more point, within the abbreviated space of this letter. Think of the allusions that abound in *Détective*—especially those from Rimbaud, from *Vol de Nuit*, from *The Tempest*, and (most centrally) from *Lord Jim*. Just clever name-dropping, as Godard's detractors might assume. Not at all. Each of these citations refers to different sites of exile, a theme that Godard has come to feel most deeply as he strives to continue his work in a world that entails so many financial difficulties and which encourages so dismissive a press. 'I am the only American filmmaker in exile,' Godard has recently declared. 'American films are my parents.' And so it is that in *Détective*, Godard has wanted to make a film as difficult of intrigue as *The Big Sleep* and as poignant in its sense of personal isolation as a poem by Rimbaud. And so he has.

It may be true that young film students prefer *Pierrot le Fou* to *Passion*. They also prefer *Casablanca* to *Rambo*. It may

also be true that Renoir's *French Cancan* lacks the youthful spontaneity of *Une Partie de Campagne*. Older men do not think like younger men. But they can still think clearly. Yes, Jean-Pierre Léaud now has become suddenly old. But it is not Jean-Luc Godard who is out of touch with what is happening in the world. It is Father Marc Gervais.

Yours faithfully,
PETER HAROURT
Carleton University
Ottawa

how could Sennett have passed by its extraordinarily dramatic close shots (not of course mentioned in the synopsis)?

The Griffith group points to this international invention in their newly published reference work, *D. W. Griffith and the Biograph Company* (Scarecrow Press): see page 50.

Yours historically,
JAY LEYDA
New York University

SIR: I should mention that it was in the first NEFA Catalogue of Fictional Films that I noticed the resemblance of the Physician's action to that of *The Lonely Villa*, a suspicion reinforced by an accidental viewing of the Pathé film in the Film Archive of China. Nor was that the end of Sennett and Griffith's use of the Pathé film; three years later Sennett provided the 'story' of *The Lone-dale Operator*, directly deriving its structure from *The Lonely Villa*.

Cinemas have got smaller

SIR.—It was good to see Brian Winston (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1985) nailing that old McLuhan myth about the difference between electronically and photographically created images. It was interesting, though, to note his acceptance of another myth—the one about the impossibility of re-creating with a small screen the experience of viewing films originally made for cinema.

Well, it depends where you sit, what cinema or television set you use and when you were born. As a student, I often had to sit in the nine-pennies where the screen did occupy 'almost the entire field of vision' (and also induced an acute pain in the neck). On the other hand, I first saw *Citizen Kane* as a postage-stamp sized picture from the back of the chattering 'gods' in a huge Gaumont. To paraphrase Norma Desmond, it is not the screens that have got bigger but the cinemas that have got smaller. We forget that in the heyday of the cinema most people saw movies as most people today see television.

But, of course, any myth depends for survival on faulty memory. This helps to explain the biggest of all movie myths—the one concerning the quality of movie 'classics'. Seen now on television, most affectionately remembered movies look pretty thin. *North by Northwest*, for example, has one or two stunning moments held together by pasteboard characters in artificial situations that only a younger Robin Hood could find significant. Memories of such movies are greater than the sum of a few excellent parts; we seem to have

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rejected their instant imagination and replaced it with the real thing.

Perhaps the few films that were born great deliberately used the audience's creative imagination, whereas others happened to achieve a spurious greatness because of the irrepressibility of this creative urge. There must be a lesson here for film-makers—a lesson crystallised in the definition of poetry as that which occurs between the lines of verse. Too much contemporary film and television lengthily provides the sort of detail which might just be acceptable to the reader of an old-fashioned novel but which, ready-made on the screen, leaves the imagination stone cold. Let film-makers compare the poems of Thomas Hardy with his novels, or Tolstoy's novels with Chekov's stories. Let them leave 'spaces' in their work to accommodate the imagination and to give it room to breathe and grow.

Yours faithfully,
F. AICKEN
Hatfield

Film School

SIR,—I am writing through your columns, in an attempt to contact as many former students and staff of the London International Film School (and its predecessor schools) as possible.

In September 1956 a group of would-be students turned up at the Heatherly School of Fine Art in Chelsea, having enrolled for a course in film technique, only to find that there had been a split in the organisation. The film course had 'hived off', under the leadership of Gilmore Roberts, and had set up a separate film school in a derelict greengrocer's shop in Pimlico. From such unpromising beginnings the school eventually developed into the London International Film School.

Although the name has gone through two intermediate stages, from London School of Film Technique to London Film School, and although the constitution was radically reconstructed when the present School was formed from the wreck of the L.F.S., there has been a continuous tradition which has given all ex-students the sense of belonging to the same family of film-makers.

In September 1986 the School will be inaugurating a complete academic year of celebrations and fund-raising, to mark thirty years of the School's life.

At the time of writing this letter, our plans are in the earliest stages, but we hope to organise a grand international reunion for all ex-students and former members of staff. For this to be a success, it will be necessary for us to contact as many alumni as possible and I hope

that all graduates from the I.S.F.T., L.F.S. and L.I.F.S. who read this letter will write to me at the School as soon as possible, so that we can organise not only the reunion but also the many other events we have in mind for the thirtieth anniversary year.

Yours faithfully,
PHIL MOTTRAM
Administrator
London International Film School
24 Shelton Street
London WC2H 9HP

Ysani again

SIR,—John Watsham is right to point out in your Winter issue that Ysani was a priestess, and so she appears in my book *Film Making in 1930s Britain*. It is in the SIGHT AND SOUND review of my book that she is surprisingly transformed into a princess.

As for length, how short is short? In order to qualify as a feature film for the obligatory British quota a film had to be 3,000 feet or more. This fortunetelling 'film' was registered with the Board of Trade at 3,088 feet. It was an ingenious way to comply with the law, but perhaps when Mr Watsham showed it he found 32 minutes of Ysani just too much, and cut it.

Yours faithfully,
RACHAEL LOW
Cambridge

Obituary

SIR,—Checking through the listings for your '1985 Obituary' I was nonplussed to note the omission of that fine actor Lloyd Nolan—until I realised that he had been telescoped together with the somewhat inapposite Julian Beck, he of the Living Theater. And furthermore, imagine how I felt to discover on the same page that the activities described in *The Phenix City Story* had been shifted to my own fair and blameless hometown!

Yours faithfully,
CAROLINE ST. ANNS
Phoenix
Arizona

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CLAIRE BARWELL is a film-maker and freelance researcher . . . JULIAN JACKSON is a freelance television researcher . . . WILLIAM JOHNSON is New York editor of *Film Quarterly* . . . BELINDA MEARES is a New Zealand-born freelance writer working in Paris . . . CHRISTOPHER PALMER has orchestrated the music for several films, most recently Elmer Bernstein's for *Spies Like Us* . . . SARAH STREET works at the Bodleian and is co-author of *Cinema and State*, published last year by the BFI . . . JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR is art critic of *The Times*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *Revolution*, *The Color Purple*, *Silverado*.

CANNON for *The Satin Slipper*. VIRGIN for *Ran*, *A.K.*

LONDON FILM MAKERS' CO-OP for 'New' Women Film-Makers LFF entry.

MARK FORSTATER PRODUCTIONS for *The Fantast*.

MIP for *A Room with a View*.

UMBRELLA FILMS/ERIC CARO for *Nanou*.

UMBRELLA FILMS/MONICA DOUEK for *Hôtel du Paradis*.

CINEMA CITY for *Banana Cop*.

EVERGREEN FILMS for *Taipei Story*.

HUNGAROFILM for *The Package Tour*.

JOSEPH FEURY PRODS for *What Sex Am I?*

MISR INTERNATIONAL/LYRIC/TFI FILMS for *Adieu, Bonaparte*.

FASO FILM/PEA for *Ginger & Fred*.

NEUE CONSTANTIN/ARIANE FILMS/RAI for *The Name of the Rose*.

ROSA FREY PRODUCTIONS for *Esperando la Carroza*.

BBC TV for *The Insurance Man*.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE for photographs of the Eiffel Tower, Silvia Berlusconi, Jérôme Seydoux, Christophe Riboud.

GAMMA for *Max, Mon Amour*.

GROUZIA FILM for *The Fortress of Suram*.

DON BACHARDY for drawing of Christopher Isherwood.

WILLIAM FRANKLIN for photograph of Christopher Isherwood.

DAVID ROBINSON/LE GIORNATE DEL CINEMA MUTO, PORDENONE for Italian Silent Comedy.

TONY RAYNS for stills from Japanese independent films.

BFI PRODUCTION for *Caravaggio*, *Wings of Death*.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Becky Sharp*, *Beggars of Life*, *Scandal in Casa Polidor*, *Great Expectations*, *Friday the Thirteenth*, *The Glass Mountain*, *Hue and Cry*, *Crown vs Stevens*, *There Ain't No Justice*, *Rembrandt*, *Knight Without Armour*, *I, Claudius*, photographs of Denham, Korda, Dimitri Tiomkin.

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ON NOW

● THE LIGHTSHIP

(Rank)

In what is par for the Skolimowski course, *The Lightship* is an American production, adapted from a German novel, and filmed off the island of Sylt. It might, one feels, also have been adapted from Joseph Conrad's *Victory*, or be another variation of Polanski's *Cul de Sac*. Perhaps it's a situation the Poles know only too well: the man who has tried to make himself an island but finds himself a magnet for hostile intruders. That the latter should come in car or boat-loads of three is another absurd consistency, and one that Skolimowski turns to most eccentric use: his three have pulled a hold-up and are led by dandy Robert Duvall, a combination of Dostoevskian philosopher and Capote-ish prankster. The isolate is lightship captain Klaus Maria Brandauer, saddled as well with a rebellious teenage son (further par for Skolimowski). Knives flash, but it's the absurdist/existential metaphysics which create the real excitement.

● OUT OF AFRICA

(UPI)

Several presences hover through Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, guiding her memoir without ever quite being embodied in it. There is the colonial presence, ironically aware of its own lack of place, superfluous and rather absurd to the native population; there is the novelist to be, shining in the exquisitely turned phrases on people and places, which frequently seem about to turn into their own self-contained short stories. None of this has exactly been ruled out of the film, but it has been pushed further back—the presences are remoter still—by another kind of reverie, a nostalgic one, of love briefly, even reluctantly, glimpsed and lost. Meryl Streep and Robert Redford move through this elegy with a certain graceful detachment of their own, and the film purrs pleasantly along (like one of its own big cats, imported from California), avoiding the problem areas (nostalgia for lost Empire) but in the end rather enervated by its own neatly defined sense of absence and loss. (Klaus Maria Brandauer; director, Sydney Pollack.)

● SWEET DREAMS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

In Michael Apted's biopic of country singer Loretta Lynn, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, Beverly D'Angelo gave a memorable cameo as Loretta's 'rival' Patsy Cline. Now we have Patsy's own story: her hard-grind beginnings in Virginia, stardom through the Grand Old Opry and an untimely death in an air crash. Like Apted, who also brought a somewhat

similar outsider's sensibility to the world of American country and western, Karel Reisz turns the temperature right down. His tone has a measured detachment and what emerges is an engagingly modest character study, beautifully shot against the dun background of the rural 50s: a sort of old-fashioned riposte to punk. Jessica Lange, as Patsy, gives a marvellously fluid and vivacious performance, notwithstanding that the singing voice is Patsy's: the part is a gift to a modern Hollywood actress—she has her career and she copes with a recalcitrant, second-fiddle husband (admirably played, incidentally, by Ed Harris).

CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR

(Rank)

An everyday story of cave-dwelling folk circa 35,000 years ago: the actors converse (with aid of subtitles) in ughs and ahs; audiences may respond in much the same way. (Darryl Hannah, Pamela Reed; director, Michael Chapman.)

COMMANDO

(Fox)

A formula action movie along *Rambo* lines, with a sadistic/homoerotic subtext about the relationship of Arnold Schwarzenegger, a retired secret agent whose daughter has been kidnapped, and villain Vernon Wells. Some nice explosions, one or two adequate jokes. (Rae Dawn Chong; director, Mark L. Lester.)

DETECTIVE

(Artificial Eye)

In a playful recycling of *The Tempest* (in the form of a thriller just as 'no exit' as *Made in USA*), Godard contemplates the drowning of his quarrel with commercial cinema and its magic. Back to *Pierrot le Fou*, too, for a despairingly awed exploration of the enduring mystery of the human heart. Godard at his marvellous, maddeningly elusive best. (Nathalie Baye, Claude Brasseur, Johnny Hallyday.)

ELENI

(Rank)

Greek tragedy or American revenge? For all its simplifications, Greek American reporter Nicholas Gage's account of his quest for the man who ordered his mother's death in the Greek civil war at least balanced personal obsession with a version of the historical context. The film opts for melodrama, with Steve Tesich's screenplay pitting goodies (the political Right and the morally right) against baddies (the Left, seen throughout as guilty men), and Kate Nelligan playing village woman Eleni as a latter-day Antigone. The truth—and the impact—fades like a mountain echo. (John Malkovich; director, Peter Yates.)

THE EMPTY TABLE

(Electric Pictures)

How does the Japanese family cope when one of its sons is publicly exposed as a murderous terrorist from the Red Brigades?

By running mad around the loss of face and disintegrating, according to this beautifully crafted but disarmingly empty soap opera. (Tatsuya Nakadai; director, Masaki Kobayashi.)

FLESH AND BLOOD

(Rank)

A muddy tale of medieval pillage and rapine: pumped-up performances, blatant misogyny, assorted tortures and an outbreak of the Black Death contribute to the overall texture. (Rutger Hauer, Jennifer Jason Leigh; director, Paul Verhoeven.)

THE HITCHER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Hitchhiker Rutger Hauer arbitrarily torments and murders motorists: a baffling, auto-paranoid horror movie along the lines of *Duel* and *Halloween*, notable mainly for its bogeyman and some Grand Guignol jokes about fingers in the French fries. (Director, Robert Harmon.)

LAMB

(Cannon)

Colin Gregg's fastidious and handsomely photographed version of Bernard MacLaverty's tragic novel about a young priest at a bleak Galway road home and his confused bid for freedom with one of his charges, a 10-year-old epileptic, argues powerfully against beating goodness into troublesome boys. A glittering performance by Ian Bannen, as the home's cynical, duplicitous, world-weary principal, compensates for implausible stretches (the police are very slow) and some dispensable signposting: fateful, peculiarly rending Irish doom. (Liam Neeson, Hugh O'Conor.)

LAST NIGHT AT THE ALAMO

(Action Screen)

A 16mm slice of semi-underground life from the Southwest, about the last stand at Houston's Alamo bar. It has a rowdy conviction, but its *Last Picture Show* allegory is thin, and its reflections on Texas' movie myths not as penetrating as Altman's *Jimmy Dean*. (Sonny Davis; director, Eagle Pennell.)

MR LOVE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Middle-aged municipal gardener discovers a kind of loving in Southport's answer to *The Man Who Loved Women*. Moments of authentic sentiment lose out to provincial whimsy and an overload of archness. (Barry Jackson; director, Roy Battersby.)

THE QUIET EARTH

(Cannon)

Waking up to find that the human race seems to have disappeared, scientist Bruno Lawrence is torn between the need to recreate the world he has lost and an understandable desire to go crazy. Intelligent, zombie-free science fiction from New Zealand in an apocalyptic vein. (Director, Geoff Murphy.)

ROCKY IV

(UPI)

The series continues to mint

money: here Rocky fights technologically trained Russian (Dolph Lundgren). Director/star Sylvester Stallone parries the obvious and scores some telling points: he has something to say (surprisingly) about détente and unstereotyped man.

RUNAWAY TRAIN

(Cannon)

A pounding, convicts-on-the-run suspense picture (from a Kurosawa story): Andrei Konchalovsky, remembering his Russian roots, packs a weighty symbolic punch as Jon Voight, the lifer who redeems himself, pits his will against impossibly vengeful warden John P. Ryan. Nervy, exciting violence; immaculate, metallic camerawork; unstoppable pace.

SPIES LIKE US

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Or 'The Road to Siberia'. Chevy Chase and Dan Aykroyd play Bing and Bob, and bungle their way through an espionage plot about a lunatic attempt to test the Strategic Defence Initiative. Sporadically funny, with some nice turns from old timers Steve Forrest and William Prince, and even more in-joke cameos than director John Landis' *Into the Night*.

STREETWISE

(Mainline)

Mary Ellen Mark and Cheryl McCall followed up their *Life* magazine story on a group of hustling Seattle street urchins with this fluid, hi-tech documentary which, despite an undercurrent of voyeurism, lodges powerfully and painfully in the mind. (Director, Martin Bell.)

THE STUFF

(Recorded Releasing)

'The Stuff', a fast-food sensation, is in fact a 'Blob'-like entity from the bowels of the earth. Larry Cohen in bizarre mood: off-the-wall performances make up for decidedly choppy direction and editing. (Michael Moriarty, Andrea Marcovicci, Paul Sorvino.)

A WOMAN OR TWO

(Virgin)

Starting out quite divertingly as a latter-day approximation to screwball comedy, this tale of a bashful archaeologist losing his heart to a Manhattan model succumbs for subsequent lack of nourishment in either plotting or treatment. (Gérard Depardieu, Sigourney Weaver; director, Daniel Vigne.)

A YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN

(Blue Dolphin)

In the aftermath of the War, a penetrating wind blows together and then parts an American soldier and a Polish widow: the Russian liberation of Poland is clearly only a partial victory. Writer-director Krzysztof Zanussi, who draws affecting performances from his principals, occasionally lets fly with moments of explosive feeling which give an edge to the old story of unfulfilled love and unavailing constancy. (Maja Komorowska, Scott Wilson.)

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